

A phenomenological study of the experience of transition into the sixth form in a rural upper school

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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Education.

Preface

This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Education at the University of Cambridge. The research it contains was conducted under the supervision of Dr R. W. McLellan in the Faculty of Education.

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee

Abstract

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This exploratory study considered the experience of students in a rural upper school as they moved into the sixth form. In the literature surrounding transition and transfer there is little written in relation to this stage in students' academic lives. Studies that have investigated transition and transfer have tended to focus on the move from primary school to secondary school, or from school to university and the associated academic and social challenges. Understanding the experience of transition into the sixth form is particularly relevant to school practice at the moment as we have moved to a position where all students have to remain in some form of education until the age of 18. As a result, sixth form providers are no longer working with only the most able students, but increasingly diverse cohorts.

In order to develop a holistic understating of student experience, interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to identify and understand themes associated with moving into the sixth form. Ten students participated in the research, and their narratives provided insight into the experience of transition that was rich and detailed. From their accounts it was possible to identify six shared themes which resonated across the group. These included teachers expecting students to take greater control of their own learning, coping with an increased workload, being able to self-regulate, developing new strategies to cope with the workload, enjoying increased teacher support and feeling more self-efficacious.

Based on the experiences of the students, several recommendations were made that could be considered in order to inform practice. Some examples of these included continuing the existing induction support offered to students, providing opportunities for current sixth form students to discuss and share their experiences with younger students, more rigorous support and guidance associated with subject choice and the development of self-regulated learning strategies in earlier years.

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1 Research context

Transition and transfer across and between schools and school phases are areas of educational research that have enjoyed sustained and varied scrutiny. However, there is a conspicuous gap in this body of literature regarding transition into the sixth form. Through this exploratory study, I have collated a range of student experiences as they made the move into the sixth form. This began in 2010 with data collection occurring in the two academic years spanning 2013 to 2015. I worked with ten students who shared their narratives of what it was like to move from year 11 to year 12. An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach was taken to analysing the data. IPA is an '*approach to psychology ... able to capture the experiential and qualitative*' (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 4). Using this methodology, I was able to develop a detailed understanding of the students' experience of transition, which included both their own interpretations as well as those offered by the literature. From this, I have been able to offer several recommendations for practice so that schools can effectively support students through this period.

In this chapter, I intend to outline the context within which my proposed research was sited. This contextual information will include the pertinent government agendas, my own professional context and a summary of my own research to date on transition into the sixth form.

1.1 Government agendas

Schools are constantly under pressure from the ever-expanding litany of government educational policy. Now, education for post-16 students is one of the many areas facing rapid change.

It is within this backdrop of both current and future government agendas that my study was developed in 2010. It was my hope that the findings of this exploratory research would be both timely and useful in order to inform school practice as the new policy requirements were addressed. In this section, I intend to outline the government agendas that had a direct impact

on transition and transfer into the sixth form. I will expand on what the terms transition and transfer encompass in the literature review. For now, I will consider the Government agendas that have made transition and transfer into the sixth form an area of focus for schools.

The September Guarantee (DCSF, 2009a) and the Raising of the Participation Age (DCSF, 2009) had a significant influence on student intake into post-16 education. These new policies meant that sixth forms were no longer the preserve of an academic few, but fully inclusive student bodies. Both of these initiatives meant levels of participation post-16 increased and what follows is an outline of the impact of each. The September Guarantee (DCSF, 2009a) for school leavers entitled all 16 and 17 year olds who wished to stay in learning a place in a sixth form, college, apprenticeship or training. This has meant that school sixth forms are now accepting, and having to educate, a much wider spectrum of students. Such an array of abilities means that those students who do not cope well with transition, either due to psychosocial factors or the discontinuities they experience need school sixth forms to be increasingly supportive and adept at identifying potential student issues.

The biggest change to post-16 education was the Raising of the Participation Age (RPA). The RPA *'means that all young people will continue in education or training to 17 from 2013 and to 18 from 2015'* (DCSF, 2009, p2). The increase in the participation age was largely designed to help reduce the number of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). Many of the issues related to transition and transfer are of particular importance, as although participation rates are increasing, in the UK we have a high dropout rate by the age of 17. Currently the UK is ranked 24th out of 30 by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) on our levels of young people who are NEET (OECD, 2018). This relatively high rate of students not in some form of learning may be indicative of difficulties faced by young people as they make the transition into post-16 settings like the sixth form. By better understanding the transition phase, school sixth forms should be able to anticipate and mediate issues that cause students difficulty during this period. Seeing issues related to transition develop in my own sixth-form classes has led me to feel that research in this area would not only be timely, but also useful for my institution in order to help support our sixth-form students more effectively.

1.2 Personal context

I began teaching in my last school in 2004 and at that time was employed as a geography classroom teacher with only a limited amount of teaching time with sixth-form students. Over the course of my career, most of the additional responsibilities I gained involved work with the sixth form. In my first post with additional paid responsibilities, I was in charge of curriculum enrichment in the sixth form. This meant that I was required to oversee all of the courses that students took in year 13 to supplement their core courses. This included subjects like the Certificate in Finance, General Studies and Government and Politics. In addition to this, I was also responsible for developing the study skills curriculum. Study skills lessons were timetabled once a fortnight in order for the sixth form pastoral team to work with their tutees. These lessons covered not only sessions to develop the students' study skills, but also provided time to work on UCAS applications, CVs and personal statements, as well as providing reflective time for target setting and reflection on progress. Following on from my role as curriculum enrichment co-ordinator, I also became a Head of Department for both geography and geology.

I was in an unusual position as a researcher as I was working in, and researching the same institution I attended as a student. I was therefore carrying out research into a phenomenon in which I myself participated within the very same institution. However, the school to which I returned as a teacher was unrecognisable to that I knew as a student. There were a handful of familiar faces from that time, but most of the staff body was new. This personal link to the research offered both challenges and an additional degree of insight. As someone who went through the transition into the sixth form in the same school, with some of the same teachers still present, I have shared the same experience as the students I worked with. However, the sixth form into which I transitioned was very different in comparison to the sixth form operating currently. The scope of courses, the number of students, the care with which students are prepared and brought through the transition and the changes to teaching and learning, unsurprisingly render my experience of transition out-dated. The biggest issue I encountered as a researcher was not to allow my experiences to colour any interpretations of what the students said about their transition. As such, I needed to think carefully about my methodological approach to ensure that I did not impose my preconceptions onto student experiences. These issues will be discussed in more depth in the methodology section.

Through my work as curriculum enrichment co-ordinator, subject leader for geography and geology and as a sixth-form tutor, I became acutely aware of the issues students faced as they moved from year 11 into year 12. In particular, this issue gained prominence when I became a sixth-form tutor and subsequently lead teacher for curriculum innovation in the sixth form. My initial interest was in response to the attainment differences between students at GCSE to that at post-16, as outlined in the school Ofsted report at that time.

Standards are above average at the end of Year 11 and students make good progress having joined the school with broadly average levels of attainment in English, mathematics and science. In the sixth form the school admits students from a wide range of abilities. From a low starting point overall in the sixth form students make good progress and achieve broadly average standards. (OFSTED, 2009).

This change in performance led me to consider what occurred during the transition into the sixth form where the same cohort of students, which could achieve above the national average in year 11, then only achieved broadly average standards in the sixth form. It should be noted as the only sixth form provision in the town, only a very small number of students joined the sixth form from other schools. To isolate what issues may be influencing student performance in the sixth form; I developed the research rationale that enabled me to complete my MEd thesis in this area (Duncombe, 2011). Through this work, I sought to investigate the experience of transition for one-year group as they progressed from year 11 into year 12. As well as attempting to gain an overview of student experience, I also wanted to investigate whether or not students' pre-transition views matched their post-transition experiences. I also considered the effects of gender and familial experience on student experience of transition into the sixth form. The results of my MEd thesis produced many interesting findings, but also highlighted many new questions that could be extended and considered in more detail.

1.3 Implications for the research

The findings from my MEd thesis showed that transition into the sixth form offered students unique challenges and opportunities in comparison to transitions and transfers at earlier key stages. It was clear that the key challenges associated with transition into the sixth form for

all students was learning to deal with increased academic rigour and workload. Due to the time limits of the MEd research and the research design I chose, what I was unable to do was consider the process of transition as a complete experience. I had instead focused on specific aspects and as a result could not offer any insight into the overall experience of transition for students. This study provided the opportunity to research in more detail the complete student experience during transition into the sixth form. The extended time scale associated with this work meant I was able to complete a study in which I worked with successive cohorts of students, something I identified as a limitation from my MEd.

As I have used an IPA approach in this study, the literature review took on a different role in comparison to a study that might have aimed to identify patterns in data or generalise in order to apply concepts or theories to wider populations. In this instance the following review will be used to place the study in context with the wider literature and identify current understanding of what the experience of transition and transfer entails (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). This is important so that the study can be effectively framed and developed in light of current research on the phenomenon under consideration. However, a careful balance must be struck between using the literature to identify and develop pertinent research questions and not pre-empting what an individual might say about the phenomenon being studied. However, the literature review does provide an opportunity to access pre-existing knowledge or pre-conceptions so that they can be dealt with reflexively during the analysis of the participant narratives (Smith et al., 2009). What follows is an account of my review of this literature and its implication for my own research.

2. Literature review

In this chapter, an overview of the literature that is pertinent to the process of transition is provided. In my research context, the majority of students transition directly from year 11 into the sixth form. A small number of students transfer from other institutions but this is rare. Students who transition into the sixth form remain within the same building and work with the same staff body as they will have done in previous years. Although transition is the dominant experience within my research setting, I intend to engage with research that covers both transition and transfer. For clarity, the difference between transition and transfer are outlined in the following section. The reason for considering both transition and transfer literature is that there is relatively little written specifically about transition. I will also make use of literature sources that deal with transition and transfer in both school and higher education settings. The higher education research will be of use as many of the challenges that may potentially face students in the sixth form (such as the management of free time and the need to work independently) are also present for students as they move from school to higher education providers. In the next section, I will give the context for the literature and then outline the key issues that affect students during both transition and transfer.

2.1 Context of existing research on transition and transfer

Transfer between institutions is a systematic process that every student must undergo at some stage in their academic career. For most, transfer produces short term issues (such as the anxiety of finding your way, or keeping up with more academically taxing work) from which any problems arising are resolved quickly. For a small minority the issues are wider ranging and deeply impacting (Galton, Gray & Rudduck, 1999). Understandably, there has been a large body of research produced on this subject. Within this body of research, the terms transition and transfer are often used interchangeably. For clarity, I will adopt the definition as used by Galton, *et al.* (1999) whereby the move from one institution to another is termed ‘transfer’ and the move from one-year group to the next within a school is termed ‘transition’. I have adopted Galton’s definitions as these were clarified in his 1999 work after an extensive review of the literature in this area.

Most of the literature on transition and transfer has focused on the personal, social and emotional aspects of transfer. For example, the seminal work by Measor and Woods (1984) where they investigated student's self-identities. Much less work has been done on the academic impact of transfer. One of the earliest of the studies, which did consider the psychosocial impacts of transfer on academic performance, formed part of the ORACLE study. This study followed a group of students both before and after the transfer process. Two of the resulting volumes from this research, *Moving from the Primary Classroom* (Galton & Willcocks, 1983) and *Inside the Secondary Classroom* (Delamont & Galton, 1986) were concerned specifically with the effects of transfer on student's attitudes and attainment.

More recently, there has been increased interest in the effects of transition. Much less work has been done in this area, but one example is the longitudinal study by Rudduck, Chaplain & Wallace (1996), which highlighted the issue of a drop in student performance and motivation towards the end of year 7 and into year 8. Despite all of this research there is a great sparsity with reference to transition and transfer into the sixth form (Evans, George, White & Sharp, 2010; Galton, personal communication, December 7, 2009). This is hardly surprising since, until fairly recently, the move into the sixth form has remained the preserve of a relatively small minority of academically successful students.

Despite the lack of research into the experience of students as they move into the sixth form, there is a significant amount of research into how sixth form students cope with the move into higher education. Much of this research considers how first year undergraduates react to the challenges of education in a higher education setting. Higher education establishments often commission this work as they attempt to reduce the rate of first year dropouts. The research considers a wide range of factors that affect student's efficacy and ability to cope with the change to a more independent style of learning. Macaro and Wingate (2004) studied the reaction of higher achieving students as they move to higher education. They considered a number of theories of motivation in relation to how students reacted to the challenges of learning in a higher education setting. Other authors, such as Heiman and Kariv (2004), considered how stress factors, social support and coping strategies affect how students cope with the transfer to higher education. These studies may provide useful parallels into the sorts of issues faced by students as they move into the sixth form, as at both transfer points, students are required to operate in an increasingly more independent and self-motivated manner (Heiman & Kariv, 2004; Macaro & Wingate, 2004). There is also the additional

comparability in that Higher Education studies are based on students who are a similar age to sixth-form students. This is in contrast to the transfer literature, which is largely based on the move to secondary school at the age of eleven. As both a sixth-form subject teacher and as a sixth-form pastoral tutor, I have seen significant numbers of students struggle with the transition to sixth form. It is clear that by understanding in more detail the range of issues that face these students, we could, as an institution be more effective at identifying when students may be struggling and therefore offer targeted support and guidance.

Due to the lack of information specific to transition into the sixth form, I will have to rely on research produced on transitions and transfers from earlier key stages and the transfer to university. I will not attempt to expand this to the wider provision provided by apprenticeships and training. The rationale for this is that apprenticeships and training occur in settings that are inherently different from a school. For example, in apprenticeships and other practical training schemes, students learn in the work place rather than a classroom and engage in a significantly different model of learning. In apprenticeships, students work as part of communities of practice where experienced individuals pass on their knowledge and skills to novices (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Such a significant disparity means that the transition and transfer experiences of these students will be very different simply due to the ecological changes that they experience. To be able to draw sensible comparisons from the literature it seems best to focus as much as is practicable on research from school-based settings. This, to some extent, will mean that the studies will share basic variables such as the focus on aspects such as academic performance, the ability to meet deadlines, time management and the types of teaching and learning. Having a range of shared variables should help improve comparability between studies. As well as increasing comparability, drawing from studies that are focused in school settings will also resonate with the homogenous sampling strategy used in IPA studies. These homogenous groups are identified through purposive sampling so that the question under consideration will be significant for the participants (Smith & Osborn, 2003). It would seem to hold true therefore that the literature identified and used in this review should be similarly purposively selected and where possible reflect as closely as possible the experience of transition into the sixth form.

Cotterell (1992) provides a useful way of considering the vast array of literature on transition and transfer. Although the way in which Cotterell outlines how we can break up the literature on transition and transfer is not widely referred to in other studies, I found that it resonated

strongly with my own understanding of the literature and so provided an extremely useful way of categorising the studies in this review. He suggests that research on transition and transfer broadly fits into two theories. Each theory attempts to explain the difficulties faced by students through the process of transfer. The first theory is a discontinuity theory that considers the role of systematic differences after transfer, which may produce mismatches between the person and their environment. It is hypothesised that mismatches may then manifest themselves as a decline in motivation and achievement. The literature in this area is vast and considers a wide range of areas that create discontinuities, which may result in issues for students. Some consider effects such as the role of friendships (Wargo Aikins, Bierman & Parker, 2005), whilst others considered the psychological adjustment of students (Lohaus, Elben, Ball & Klein-Hessling, 2004) and a large number of studies consider a wide range of discontinuities faced by students as they change schools (Zeedyk, Gallacher, Henderson, Hope, Husband & Lindsay, 2003). The second theory is a cumulative change theory. Research that falls into this broad category considers the effects on students of the coincidence of several psychosocial changes occurring at once, for example Hines (2007), Lipps (2005), Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton-Ford and Blyth (1987). In this type of research, the focus is how students deal with multiple life-events. In the case of the work by Simmons, *et al.* (1987), they considered the impact of facing the two major life-events at once – namely the transfer to a new secondary school and the onset of puberty. In the subsequent sections of this literature review, I will investigate the range of research within both of these theories to examine the ways in which they may help illuminate student transition into the sixth form. I will start with the literature that falls within the discontinuity theory as this is the theory within which most of the research on transition and transfer falls. This will then be followed by the literature that investigates the role of cumulative changes.

2.2 Discontinuity theory

In the first part of this section, I offer a brief overview of the types of work that have been carried out within the discontinuity theory of school transfer. I will then consider, in more detail, the sorts of specific issues considered in this area of research. These issues include social concerns, student–teacher relationships, student groups and patterns of behaviour,

factors that may increase the negative impacts of transition or transfer and the factors that may impede academic progress.

The vast majority of the school-based literature considers transfer and its associated challenges. In particular, focusing on how students cope with the personal, social and emotional aspects of transfer. Measor & Woods (1984) considered this extensively, in particular the way in which students have to construct new self-identities in an unfamiliar setting. Other literature on transition and transfer considered key points in student experiences. Most of this school-based literature focused on the transfer between primary and secondary school. Examples of this literature include work by Noyes (2006); Galton, Gray and Rudduck (2003); Lucey and Reay (2000); Measor and Woods (1984) and Nisbet & Entwistle (1969). They found that the transition experience is centred on a range of short-term issues and concerns associated with the challenges of a new school setting. There were only a small number of students for whom transfer has any lasting negative impacts (Galton & McLellan, 2018; West, Sweeting & Young, 2010; Galton, *et al.*, 1999).

The literature regarding student transfer to higher education establishments has grown in response to the commercial need for higher education providers to ensure that first year drop-out rates remain low. As such, this research often focuses on aspects such as how students cope with the new academic demands of higher education (Burton & Dowling, 2005; Heiman & Kariv, 2004; Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000) and student study skills (Roberts, 1981; Dean, 1978). This research shares many common factors with the research completed on student transfer from primary to secondary education. Both areas show that students have to cope with the reforming of self-identities (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Measor & Woods, 1984) as well as working in new ways in their new academic setting (Burton & Dowling, 2005; Heiman & Kariv, 2004; Hargreaves & Galton, 2002; Delamont & Galton, 1986; Measor & Woods, 1984; Youngman, 1978). The most significant discrepancy between this research is the added social dimension in higher education settings where students are also coping with the reorganisation of roles with family and friends as they move away from the home environment (Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan & Majeski, 2004; Rickinson & Rutherford, 1995).

2.2.1 Discontinuity theory – Specific issues associated with transition and transfer

The students within my research setting transition directly from year 11 into the sixth form. Transitioning in such a setting may actually provide students with greater challenges as they attempt to cope with the new regime of study in the sixth form. By remaining in the same institution with the same staff and peers, students may be victims of a false sense of security that does not prepare them for the challenges associated with study post-16 (Demetriou, Goalen & Rudduck, 2000; Day, 1996). For those who transfer to a new institution for their post-16 education, parallels with other transfer points could be drawn. I would argue that in many respects, this is also the case for those students transitioning into the sixth form, despite the fact they remain in the same institution. To clarify this, I will highlight from the literature examples of the challenges that may be faced by students as they embark on their post-16 education. Based on my reading of the literature, the relevant themes include social concerns; student groups and patterns of behaviour; student–teacher relationships; factors that may heighten the risk of disengagement, and student progress.

Social concerns

Although in my MEd research, students had few concerns surrounding the social aspects of transition, due to the small-scale nature of the study, I feel these findings are not conclusive enough to disregard this element of transition and transfer. In the literature, social concerns are one of the most widely researched elements of transition and transfer and so I felt it important to give this theme primacy in my review. For many students this is their key concern and is the focus for much of the research (Parker, *et al.*, 2004; Pietarinen, 2000; Kvalsund, 2000; Ward, 2000; Lee, *et al.*, 1995; Rickinson & Rutherford, 1995; Delamont & Galton, 1986; Gorwood, 1986; Measor & Woods, 1984; Cotterell, 1982). The social challenges students were most concerned about were linked to the possibility of losing friends; changes to discipline and authority and the prospect of being bullied. In later research, such as that by Chedzoy and Burden (2005) and Lohaus (2004) and Lucey and Reay (2000), which has sought to reinvestigate the issues of transfer, there have been some contradictory findings to those identified by studies such as Parker *et al.* (2004) and Measor and Woods (1984). These studies identify either a lack of stress associated with transfer to a new school or a hopeful optimism associated with the changes. They show the stress of

transfer is mediated by the opportunities to develop new friendship groups, study new subjects and be treated in a more adult way. In the work by Lohaus, *et al.* (2004) the stressful elements of transfer were also mediated by the recovery effect students experienced after the school break and the preparation for transfer carried out by the primary schools.

For students who are anxious about these sorts of changes, transfer and transition is likely to be challenging. Their anxieties are often linked to disruption due to new social groupings, increasingly more adult situations and the pressures associated with new rules and procedures (Hargreaves & Galton, 2002; Delamont & Galton, 1986; Measor & Woods, 1984; Youngman, 1978). The research showed that for most students these anxieties are short-lived and long-term issues only affect a small number of students. This is mirrored in the research with higher education students.

For some the experience will be exciting. These students will tackle the challenges thrown up by new learning and social experiences. For others, the experience will be far less enjoyable and may even be traumatic, leading to an early end to their tertiary education. (Burton & Dowling, 2005, p.68).

These points are also supported by the work by Noyes (2006), Alspaugh (1998), Rudduck, Chaplain, *et al.* (1996) and Rickinson and Rutherford (1995) who all suggested that the psychological turbulence of transfer is so great that students struggle to focus on the academic and learning tasks.

The anxieties identified in the research into transition and transfer may or may not be present in all sixth-form settings. For those students moving to a sixth-form college not integrated with their own school, it is likely they too will harbour many of the social concerns that were identified in the studies of transfer from primary to secondary. However, in schools where the sixth form is integrated, it is likely these issues will be less of a concern. This was certainly the case in my previous research where students were actually looking forward to the social cohesion and fluidity they felt the school sixth form offered (Duncombe, 2011), which resonates with the work of Chedzoy and Burden (2005) and Lohaus, *et al.* (2004). However, it must not be forgotten that even in an integrated school based sixth form, there is still social challenge present. Students are leaving old social groupings by virtue of course selection and

student destinations, encountering new staff in new settings and coping with new expectations and routines.

All of these studies provide a rich source of information on the issues associated with both transition and transfer. In relation to my research, I do have to consider their usefulness. For example, earlier work by authors such as that by Measor and Woods (1984) and Beynon (1985) only followed one form group through the process of transition. These small sample sizes raise issues to do with their ability to generalise. Later examples, which employed larger samples, such as that by Chedzoy and Burden (2005) where a sample of 207 year 6 students were surveyed only utilised questionnaires. This meant that through their study they were able to identify the issues students were concerned about, but the questionnaires prevented them interrogating in detail why students felt these areas were problematic. The greatest limitation of all of these studies in light of my interest in transition into the sixth form is the necessity to extrapolate what student experiences might be like given the lack of a substantive body of work on students of sixth form age. It is the lack of understanding of this transition event which has led me to develop this study. By taking the opportunity to gather from students their experience of moving into the sixth form, I was able to offer a detailed insight into this phenomenon. Listening to, and interpreting the narratives of students moving into the sixth form provided an opportunity to identify how this experience diverged or converged with the other literature on transition and transfer. Because of this, I was able to make recommendations for practice so that schools can support students through this event, ensuring that they continue to make good progress and can fully access the curriculum.

Student–teacher relationships

It could be possible that in a transition setting, social concerns for new sixth-form students are largely ameliorated. If this is the case then perhaps the most significant issue they may have to deal with are new student–teacher relationships. Students who transition into the sixth form within their own school may appear to be less at risk from the changing relationship between students and teachers. By working with staff they may already be familiar with, initial anxiety and the period of ‘typing’ and ‘sussing out’ may be reduced (Beynon, 1985). However, staff may alter their teaching style and expectations which offers a new dimension of challenge for students (Nicholls & Gardner, 1999). Working with new members of staff

also provides students with opportunities. These include being treated in a more adult way; the opportunity of a fresh start and a new range of curriculum opportunities (Gillison, Standage & Skevington, 2008; Lee, *et al.*, 1995; Rudduck, *et al.*, 1996). The expectations of students change significantly in the post-16 setting with teachers anticipating that students will be able to self-manage their time (Dean, 1978; Roberts, 1981). Although teachers' expectations shift, both studies by Dean (1978) and Roberts (1981) demonstrate that students have difficulty with the difference and quality of work expected and the need to be able to complete this without significant guidance from their teachers. These studies are unusual in the literature in that they specifically consider the experience of students transitioning into the sixth form. The issue is that they focused on the impact of a study skills course and the way in which students approached the transition period as a result. Therefore, although they offer some unusual insight into sixth-form transition, they focus on a rather narrow range of experiences. This still leaves a lack of a substantive discourse of the range of challenges facing students as they move into the sixth form.

Student groups and patterns of behaviour

Because of new government agendas that have made sixth forms more inclusive institutions; issues linked with student groups and behaviour patterns from earlier transition and transfer points are perhaps now more pertinent. The sixth form for many students may provide an opportunity for a fresh start. However, for many, even with the best of intentions, they often slip into old patterns of behaviour. Day (1996, p.55) identified a '*pronounced demarcation into 'hard-working' and 'non-working' groups*' of students. Demetriou, Goalen and Rudduck (2000) also found these groups have a significant effect as students who are long established in the 'non-working' group were at risk from falling back into old working patterns, despite their best intentions to make a fresh start. Alongside 'non-working' students, those who have enjoyed high levels of achievement are also under pressure during the process of transition and transfer. These students need to re-establish themselves in a novel educational setting (Measor & Woods, 1984). Similar issues are also shown in the later work by Noyes (2006) who considered the diffraction of learning trajectories through the process of school transfer. In this case, he found that the strategic actions of the students, combined with teacher judgements, the school system and parental influences all played a role in how the students made progress after transfer. For some, their commitment to learning and compliant

approaches meant that they could work effectively with staff and so their transfer into the new school was successful. However, for other students, the greater freedom associated with transfer to a secondary school actually provided more opportunities for strategic resistance, creating a dissonance between their position and that of the school. Great care must be taken though with the work by Noyes as this involved the use of case studies of two students. However there is an argument that by studying individuals in great detail, we will inevitably find elements from their experiences that can be identified in the broader population, or what Bourdieu would describe as '*particularity within generality and generality within particularity*' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1989). These patterns appear common in the literature on transfer at earlier key stages. However, there is opportunity to consider these issues in a post-16 setting, as once again there is a lack of consideration of these at this transition point.

Factors that may increase the risk of long term negative impacts of transition or transfer

Those students who experience long lasting negative impacts from the process of transition and transfer are likely to have underlying factors that prevent them being able to cope with the demands of the process. As they lack the necessary personal skills to cope with the new challenges they face, these students are at risk from disengagement with the work in school.

Nisbet and Entwistle (1969) identified four main areas that become important during the transfer into secondary school: socio-economic rating, ambition, social maturity and parental encouragement. They showed that parental support and social maturity had the greatest impact on the way in which students deal with transfer. Parental support was shown to help students in overcoming the changing demands of secondary school. Students with greater social maturity were also able to adjust more rapidly. Conversely, students without this support found transfer a more traumatic experience. In addition to the four areas outlined by Nisbet and Entwistle (1969), other studies demonstrated the importance of aspects such as self-confidence and organisational skills to aid students through the transfer process. Those students who have high self-efficacy expect to take on the challenges of transfer and succeed (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008; Rudduck, *et al.*, 1996). Students who have poorly developed self-efficacy, no opportunities to articulate concerns and poor organisational skills can have problems coping and instead 'opt out' of the learning process (Galton, *et al.*, 2003). These individuals can have particular problems re-engaging in the educational process as they

become embroiled in anti-work groups. Some do manage to make the switch, often as an important examination year approaches or they are sufficiently reassured of their own capabilities. Those who may be most at risk are those students from familial backgrounds where they are the first to remain at school post-16. These backgrounds may be unable to provide the substantial support necessary. A sharp increase in the difficulty of study and the increased freedoms of the sixth form can cause serious problems for those who are academically unprepared, disorganised or who have low self-efficacy.

For some transfer provides an opportunity to re-engage, for others who lack the proper scaffolding from earlier in their academic careers, transfer may be a challenge too far (Chung, Elias & Schneider, 1998; Rudduck, *et al.*, 1996). There is also research to show that in situations where curriculum material that has already been covered is repeated post transition or transfer, the accompanying boredom experienced by some students can have a significant effect on student motivation (Skinner *et al.*, 2008). Such curriculum discontinuities are likely to be rare in a school-integrated sixth form as teaching staff will have an intimate knowledge of the preceding curriculum. In all of the studies cited above, they have focused on the move to secondary education. However, it is possible to draw parallels with the sixth form, as the same students who are at risk during school transfer will also be at risk during transition into the sixth form. For many of them, the problems experienced lower down the school will have an even greater impact in the sixth form. By this time in their educational career, anti-work groups and opting out strategies will be well practised. Although the transition point will be a welcome chance for re-engagement, for some, they will simply fall back into old routines and social groupings.

Factors that may impede academic progress

There are numerous changes in the sixth form that may affect students and cause a hiatus in their progress. Galton, *et al.* (2003, p.6) identified a range of issues that were affecting students aged seven and fourteen that could potentially lead to declined levels of progress after transition. These included '*different and heightened expectations, especially in relation to working more independently; increased curricular demands leading to feelings of pressure; new and unfamiliar ways of working; a fall-off in parental involvement.*' Any

single one of these left unaddressed could cause a hiatus in student progress and adversely affect their motivation.

Despite the growing inclusivity of sixth forms, for students studying traditional A Level courses, education post-16 is a place where the emphasis on student ability is increased. This is fostered by the increasing academic demands and higher expectations placed on students. Anderman and Maehr (1994) showed that as adolescents age they increasingly view ability as an internal trait that is unrelated to effort. Schools are institutions that inevitably highlight relative student abilities. Therefore students with low perceived self-efficacy (who doubt their ability to take on challenges and succeed) or those who have fixed views on ability may have experiences that undermine their confidence and motivation and place them at risk from disengaging from their studies (West, *et al.*, 2010; Dweck, 2000). In the case of some students, this can have devastating impacts on the way in which they approach their work. Instead of risking the social embarrassment of working hard and failing, and thereby in their mind or that of their peers appearing to be unintelligent, some withdraw their efforts, preferring to use the excuse of not trying (Rudduck, Chaplain, *et al.*, 1996; Galton & Willcocks, 1983). For some this may spiral out of control and leave them in a position where they are so far detached from their studies, that recovering is outside of their capabilities and so they disengage further.

Other disengagement may occur due to organisational issues. As students mature, they seek opportunities to exercise and express their growing social maturity. Skinner, Furrer, Marchand & Kindermann (2008), Zanobini and Usai (2002), Rudolph, Lambert, Clark and Kurlakowsky (2001), Rudduck, *et al.* (1996) and Feldlaufer, Midgley and Eccles (1988) all showed that when the opportunities to express this kind of developing maturity are missing, students may begin to withdraw their efforts and become disengaged. In a sixth form setting, this is likely to be less of an issue, as students are likely to encounter chances to operate in more mature ways, such as study periods, the ability to leave the school site and perhaps no longer having to wear a school uniform. In a similar vein, as well as outlets for demonstrating increased social maturity, there is also a need for students to be able to have outlets for increased academic challenge and maturity.

Skinner, *et al.* (2008), Galton, Gray and Rudduck (1999) and Rudduck, *et al.* (1996) showed that in areas where there was a lack of academic challenge, students were also at risk from

disengaging. Sixth forms can perhaps offer many of the social and academic challenges needed to allow students to express their increasing maturity. Such opportunities include new courses, new and more challenging lessons, new subject content and the opportunity to manage their own time and learning. However, these benefits must be tempered with the increased level of challenge and the ability to cope with these changes. Failure to cope with these opportunities may inadvertently lead to a fall in motivation and achievement (Skinner et al., 2008; Zanobini & Usai, 2002; Rudolph et al., 2001; Dweck, 2000; Feldlaufer et al., 1988).

In addition to the new workload, ways of working and increased teacher expectation is an immediate and intense focus on examinations. Pressure from staff for students to perform may be passed onto the new students (Boaler, Wiliam & Brown, 2000). This increase in pressure is usually accompanied by an increased workload, under which students may simply be worn down, resulting in a drop in motivation (Rudduck, Day & Wallace, 1996). Students who are most affected by this sort of pressure are those who relied on their peers for academic support, but due to new curriculum arrangements are now separated from one another (Galton, *et al.*, 2003). Students are also at risk when they experience problems or failure in subject areas they were previously comfortable with. This could occur due to a range of challenges, such as new teachers and expectations, heightened academic pace and more abstract subject matter (Rudduck, Chaplain, *et al.*, 1996). Examination pressure also leads to an increased level of goal-orientation amongst students (Doddington, Flutter & Rudduck, 1999). These self-imposed pressures may be added to by external burdens and lead to an overload of students and a fall in motivation. Many of the issues discussed here could be extrapolated for students of sixth form age; in particular, those associated with examination pressure and increased academic challenge. However, there is no substantive discourse in the literature that interrogates these issues with sixth-form age students.

Studies that fall into the discontinuity theory group provide a rich and varied account of the processes of transition and transfer. However, they have limitations in that they focus on a narrow range of factors that influence students. For example, the work by Pratt and George (2005) focused on the role of friendship. The research by Zanobini and Usai (2002) and Rudolph, *et al.* (2001), by contrast, considered the role of self-regulatory processes and self-concept. Although each of these offers an insight into the experience of transition and transfer, by focusing on specific elements, there is perhaps a missed opportunity to consider

this life-experience in its entirety. Research that did encompass a wider range of factors associated with transition and transfer, for example the work by Chedzoy and Burden (2005), Alspaugh (1998) and Brown and Armstrong (1982) did not attempt to elicit an explanation for the students experiences, but instead categorised and labelled them. Finally, some research utilised data collection points that meant it would be difficult to assess the role of transition or transfer effects from the wider effects of the school year. An example of this would be the work of Chung, *et al.* (1998) who assessed students in the Spring before transfer and the following Spring after transfer. Such data collection methods with widely spaced data collection points means that stressors associated with other events in the school year are difficult to disentangle from those associated with transition or transfer. As a result, there seems to be scope for an opportunity to listen to student experience of transition and transfer in its entirety.

2.3 Cumulative effect theory

Studies that fall into this category perhaps go some way to address the issue of only considering specific elements of transition or transfer. These studies instead consider the impacts of several major life events occurring concurrently, for example, the combination of pubertal onset and transfer to a new school (Simmons, *et al.*, 1987). This may at first seem to be an issue that is not applicable to a setting in which students are older and undergoing transition and not perhaps the greater stress of transfer. However, these students are going through the latter stages of puberty and are facing potential decisions to move away from the family home for the first time once their sixth form studies are complete. Therefore, although not directly analogous, there may be useful parallels that can be drawn with studies that consider the impact of the cumulative effects of several life events (Compas, 1987).

Unlike the literature that falls within the discontinuity theory model, there seems to be less agreement in the literature that falls within the cumulative effects theory. They consider life-events as significant periods of change such as the onset of puberty or the divorce of parents. The assumption that many researchers investigated was that experiencing two significant life-events at once, could have a significantly negative effect on young people. Surprisingly, all of the research directly related to the co-incidence of a major life event and transfer to a new

school seem to demonstrate that for most groups of students there is not an interaction effect and there are few problems associated with these events occurring together (Hines, 2007; Seifert & Schulz, 2007; Lipps, 2005; Simmons, *et al.*, 1987). Where the studies do show an interaction effect is when they begin to consider the role of gender. In the work by Lipps (2005), it was shown that female students who make the transition to a new school at the age of 12 or 13 had higher levels of depression than male students who made the transfer at the same age. It may be that transfer is more stressful for girls as the value systems of girls change in adolescence, with greater emphasis on peer regard (Jackson & Warin, 2000; Simmons, *et al.*, 1987). To some extent this is supported by the work of Seifert and Schulz (2007) that showed there is a direct link with student's psychological well-being and their relationships and levels of achievement. This sense of well-being forms a positive feedback loop where students who are supported by strong peer relationships feel good about themselves. These students are therefore able to build good social relations and these support psychological well-being. In a very different study, Hines (2007) considered the implications for the impact of divorce in the family and its co-incidence with school transfer. In this case, a strong gender influence was uncovered that showed that males take longer to adjust after a parental divorce and should transfer occur within that adjustment period, they may struggle to cope. This study also found that girls were more suited to coping with the concurrent effects of divorce and transfer as they were more able to adjust to the new logistical and authoritative procedures than boys.

Although very interesting and certainly illuminating, there is a great deal of difficulty in drawing parallels from this work to transition into the sixth form. Although moving into the sixth form is a significant scholastic event, when the sixth form is part of the same school within which students have studied their GCSEs, is it a significant enough event to be termed a 'life-event'? This is the first problem with considering cumulative effect literature; there is no common theoretical or even linguistic base for comparison. Different studies label the transfer to a new school differently, for example Sirsch (2003, p.394) considers transfer as '*a significant and important life event*', Lipps (2005, p.21) has concluded that transfer is '*not a general problem*' and Simmons, *et al.* (1987, p.1230) consider transfer a '*normative transition*'. Such a diverse linguistic base causes problems when trying to draw analogies to the transition into the sixth form. In addition to this, each study uses a different theoretical framework within which to analyse their results. For example the work by Lipps (2005) uses the Attachment Theory as proposed by Bowlby (1969) and the Sleeper Effect Theory as

proposed by Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989). In contrast, the work by Sirsch (2003) based much of their data analysis on Lazarus' transactional stress theory. As such, drawing direct comparisons between these works or even from them is very difficult. The final difficulty when using these research papers is the data collection methods employed by some authors. For example, the work by Lipps (2005) and Seifert and Schulz (2007) used data from a national survey. This data was collected in waves that were two years apart. Therefore, trying to assess which of the effects identified were directly related to transition was very difficult. The variety of language and theoretical models employed makes this challenging and once again, none of these studies considers the movement of students into the sixth form. What this highlights is the opportunity to carry out an exploratory study that considers the effect of transition into the sixth form holistically without trying to impose on that data any sort of model or theory. Theorising and modelling can only occur after a development of an understanding of what this transition event involves for students.

2.4 Summary of key points from the literature

This review has explored the literature available on the challenges and associated student experiences of transition and transfer. Transition and transfer for most is one of short-term social anxieties that are soon faced and overcome. As all of the students involved in this study have remained in the same institution, it is unlikely that social anxiety linked to peer relationships would be a significant problem for them. For example, the anxiety faced by students transferring schools commonly includes fears about being bullied by older students (Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Howard & Johnson, 2002). Transition into the sixth form is unlikely to engender similar concerns – these students are not encountering new individuals and are in fact becoming the most senior students in a school that they know well and have had plenty of opportunity to engage in 'typing' and 'sussing' each other out, which helps to reduce initial social anxieties (Beynon, 1985). Indeed, it is likely that many of the students viewed the move into sixth form with the same sort of optimism as outlined by later studies into transition. These researchers identified that students see the opportunities for new friendship groups, the chance to study new subjects and be treated in a more adult way as a source of optimism (Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Lohaus, *et al.*, 2004; Lucey & Reay, 2000). These studies have all worked with younger children and in particular those making the

transfer from one school to another. This study therefore provides an opportunity to listen to the experiences of students moving into the sixth form to see if these elements resonate for them. Similarities would seem likely, as in making the transition into the sixth form students have, for the first time had choice over whether or not to stay at school and if they are continuing, then they have been able to select only the subjects they wish to study. Inevitably, as the oldest year group in the school, and with increasing freedoms such as free periods and the opportunity to wear their own clothes, they are much more likely to experience being treated in a more adult way. The research question therefore needs to provide sufficient scope in order to develop student narratives that describe the experience of transition into the sixth form, in particular how the opportunities they experienced shaped this.

Instead of issues related to relationships with their peers, there may be greater social issues in the relationships between teachers and students. Moving into the sixth form marks a significant point in a student's academic life and as such this is likely to be accompanied by changing teacher expectations, which add significant challenge for students as they are expected to become more autonomous and take greater responsibility for their learning (Nicholls & Gardner, 1999; Roberts, 1981; Dean, 1978). Despite these changing expectations being a potential source for optimism, significant changes in teacher expectations can cause sufficient discontinuities to cause students problems. Clearly, at other transition and transfer points the relationships between students and their peers, and students and their teachers had significant effects. This study offers an opportunity to understand these relationships. By asking students about their experience of transition, there was the opportunity to hear about what influences the peer-peer and student-teacher relationships had on the experience of moving into the sixth form.

However, there are factors such as self-efficacy, self-image, familial background, student-teacher relationships and student groupings that all affect how students can overcome the challenge of transition and transfer. In particular, those students who were supported by parents, were socially mature, self-confident and could organise themselves were likely to find transition less challenging (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008; Rudduck, Day, et al., 1996; Nisbet & Entwistle, 1969). Those who had under-performed in lower years may have taken the opportunity to re-engage and align themselves with 'hard-working' rather than 'non-working' students (Demetriou, *et al.*, 2000; Day, 1996). Although this discourse in the literature is full and varied, the research has focused only on students moving between

primary and secondary school phases, or from school to higher education. Specifically, what was missing from the literature was any detailed exploration of the experience of students moving from secondary to post-16 provision. The studies that have covered this area were small scale and lacked follow-up or failed to work with students during the period at which transition effects were most apparent. This study provided the opportunity to work with a small number of students in detail as they described their experiences of transition and the elements that were most significant for them. In addition to considering their experiences in detail, the extended nature of the EdD also provided the opportunity to work with students over a longer period-of-time. In this way, some of the criticisms of studies that have failed to follow-up students or re-assess them later in the academic year following transition could be addressed. What follows in the next section is a description of the research question that has arisen from this literature and the associated research goals.

2.5 Research question arising from the literature

Great care must be taken when developing a research question for a study that uses IPA as there should not be any attempt to predict what the outcome might be, or to offer a theoretical construct to be ‘tested’ (Smith & Osborn, 2003). To do so would run counter to the reflexive and inductive nature of IPA. However, clear goals are also essential to demonstrate how the knowledge from the research was developed (Lopez & Willis, 2004). I wanted to ensure that the students who participated in this research were able to share their experience of transition freely and openly. I also wanted their narratives to provide a detailed understanding of transition in their context so that recommendations could be developed in order to inform school practice.

To try to address some of the shortcomings identified in the literature and to enable me to develop a detailed understanding of transition from the students’ perspective, I proposed an exploratory study with the following research question:

How do the experiences of ten students transitioning to sixth form in a rural upper school impact upon the strategies a school can implement to improve the transition process?

Further to this question, the following research goals were then developed:

- describe, in detail the experience of the transition from year 11 to the sixth form
- understand the experience of transition from the perspective of the students
- analyse the descriptions of transition in order to interpret them and produce insights into the transition process
- make recommendations that may inform practice in schools in order to make the transition process as positive as it can be for students.

What follows in the next chapter is a discussion of the selection of the research paradigm into which this study falls and how the IPA methodology used shaped the way in which data was collected and analysed.

3. Methodology

In this chapter, a number of key areas will be covered. These include the research paradigm within which my study falls; the implications this had on the methods I employed; the site of the research; the ethical issues I considered; the sample selection; the way in which I analysed the data and, finally, the data presentation techniques I employed.

3.1 Research paradigm

As a practice based researcher, I was very aware that I wanted the outcomes of this study to provide useful insights into transition so that they might inform practice. As such, I wanted to take a pragmatic approach to identifying a research paradigm and ultimately a methodology so that these suited the goals of my research and helped me to produce useful data. In this chapter, these goals and their relationship to my research paradigm and methodology will be explained to make explicit how the knowledge from this study was produced (Lopez & Willis, 2004). As already identified, the research goals for this study were to:

- describe, in detail the experience of the transition from year 11 to the sixth form
- understand the experience of transition from the perspective of the students
- analyse the descriptions of transition in order to interpret them and produce insights into the transition process
- make recommendations that may inform practice in schools in order to make the transition process as positive as it can be for students.

Through these specific goals, this research should allow me to investigate how students made sense of their experience of transition into the sixth form. What follows is a discussion of how my research goals fit within the interpretivist research paradigm and why I came to the decision to use interpretative phenomenological analysis as my methodological approach.

According to Guba (1990), paradigms can be characterised through their: ontology (What is reality?), epistemology (How do you know something?) and methodology (How do go about finding out?). These characteristics create a holistic view of how we view knowledge, including how we see ourselves in relation to it and the methodologies we use.

Methodological choices therefore depend on the research paradigm within which a researcher identifies. Guba (1990, p. 17) defines a paradigm as a '*basic set of beliefs that guide action*'. Briggs and Coleman (2002) point out that researchers make sense of information by drawing implicitly or explicitly on a set of beliefs of paradigm. Usually, researchers who adhere to a specific paradigm will agree what should count as 'normal' research as they will share and recognise similar codes, conventions and practices.

At the two extremes of the spectrum of research paradigms are the positivist and interpretivist approaches. Positivists agree that knowledge, in particular scientific knowledge is gained by collecting 'facts' which are observable, and separate from the observer (Briggs & Coleman, 2002). Researchers working within the positivist approach would consider human characteristics and attributes as variables that they can observe and measure. Records and previous observations of these variables allow positivist researchers to make predictions about what may occur in similar circumstances in the future. To test these hypotheses, experimental procedures are devised, often using groups that are carefully selected and controlled (Burton & Bartlett, 2005). Positivist researchers would agree that the approaches used in the natural sciences could also be applied when considering human behaviour and the social world. They would make the assumption that the two worlds exist in the same way and therefore can be observed in the same way (Yates, 2004).

Interpretivist researchers consider the world as a construct and as such recognise that each individual will interpret reality differently. In essence, they would dismiss the concept that there is one reality awaiting discovery. Interpretivist researchers also consider their influence on the research differently. Unlike positivist researchers who would claim objectivity and distance from the subject of research, interpretivist researchers recognise that they are part of that which is being investigated. The qualitative research generated by interpretivist researchers is often criticised as it does not produce clear un-refutable facts, but rather complex analyses and a range of possible interpretations (Nisbet, 2000). In my research setting, I recognise that the students I have worked with interpreted their experience of moving into the sixth form differently and I am aware that as a practitioner researcher I too had an impact on the research. Such a belief clearly places my research within the interpretivist paradigm. By working within this particular paradigm, my study has been framed by a number of ontological assumptions. I have already mentioned some of these very briefly, but I will now go onto some of these in more detail.

By engaging with the interpretivist paradigm, I am aware that there is not a reality out there to be measured. The reason for this is that reality is a social creation, a construct produced within the minds of individuals and reinforced by the way in which they interact with one another. As interpretivists, we can accept that there is no one universal truth, but rather a plethora of interpretations that may be made about a single event or experience, as a result of this, there is little choice but to accept a relativist ontology (Hugly & Sayward, 1987). By doing so, we accept that each experience is unique to the subject and that we must be open to this and consider ways in which we may understand and interpret this (Guba, 1990). It is this variety of experience that I was particularly interested in capturing. By citing my research within a relativist ontological approach, it was logical that I too would accept a subjective epistemology. This epistemology was appropriate for this study as I was aware that each person I have worked with will have made sense and interpreted the world in a different way, and so reality and therefore experience for every individual was subjective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Denscombe, 2002; Guba, 1990). This personal interpretation of reality is bound up by a myriad of experiences and interactions with which people then use to interpret their own reality. A subjectivist epistemology also allows us to accept that we ourselves as researchers are part of the research we undertake. In doing so we recognise our participants interpret the world they experience and that we as researchers then interpret these experiences (Denscombe, 2002).

Having identified a research paradigm within which the goals of my research fitted, I was then ready to select a methodology that would allow me to collect data to inform my research goals and offer insights from which recommendations for practice could be made. I wanted to also ensure that the methodology I chose allowed full voice to be given to the experience of the students as they moved into the sixth form. This aim of this research was not simply to identify a checklist of issues that could be solved, but rather to try to understand transition more deeply in order to identify where changes could be made to support students as best as possible. As I was interested in this experience of transition, it seemed logical to engage with a methodology that focuses on trying to understand human experience. I was therefore drawn to phenomenology, as it offered the opportunity to study student experience in its entirety. In the following section, I will outline how using a phenomenological approach allowed me to investigate the process of transition into the sixth form.

3.2 Phenomenology

Phenomenology has a rich and complex history. At its heart it is an attempt to ‘*thematise the phenomenon of consciousness and in its most comprehensive sense; it refers to the totality of lived experience that belong to one person*’ (Giorgi, 1997, p. 236). Much of the existing research on transition and transfer attempts to break down the experience into fragments to be categorised or considered in minutia, for example Zeedyk, *et al.* (2003). By contrast, using phenomenology allowed me to consider the experience of transition in its totality in what is termed the natural attitude (Van Manen, 1990). By doing so, I hoped to look anew at this event and redress some of the shortcomings of the research I reviewed in the literature section.

Phenomenology emphasises attempts to describe phenomena in the broadest sense in the ways they manifest themselves to the experiencer (Giorgi, 2007, 1997; Van Manen, 1990; Hycner, 1985). Phenomenology aims to gain insightful descriptions of experiences without attempting to classify these experiences in a way that may be used to generate theory. In fact, phenomenology in no way offers the opportunity to generate theory, but instead provides the opportunity to ‘*consider insights which bring us into more direct contact with the world*’ (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9). In order to fulfil this objective, phenomenology utilises thick descriptions that aim to illuminate lived experiences.

There is however, no one agreed phenomenological approach, but rather a range in which the different psychological approaches shape the methods and analyses used. For example, for Husserl, phenomenology offered a way for a person to accurately know their own experience of a phenomenon in such depth that they would be able to distinguish the essential qualities of this (Smith, *et al.*, 2009). For Merleau-Ponty, he too was committed to understanding our being-in-the-world, but wanted to contextualise this much more than Husserl did. He suggested that humans see themselves as different to everything else in the world because our sense of self involves us looking at the world rather than being subsumed within in it.

‘All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world, without which the symbols of science would be meaningless.’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. ix)

In this section, I will consider the central concepts of IPA, and how this methodology supported my view of how we, as individuals, make sense of and share our experiences. The three elements that inform IPA are: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography and each of these offer constructs upon which studies based on this approach are structured (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, *et al.*, 2009). Each of these three elements are discussed briefly here but dealt with in more detail individually in the subsequent three sections of this chapter.

It can be said that IPA is phenomenological because it attempts to make sense of instances when the day-to-day lived experience takes on particular significance (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Larkin & Thompson, 2011; Smith, *et al.*, 2009). This usually occurs, as the result of something significant occurring and in the case of this research was the result of the transition into the sixth form. IPA can also be said to be hermeneutic because when events take on significance in our lives, we often spend time making sense of them and as researchers we only have access to a participants experiences *via* their accounts to us (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). Therefore as researchers, we have to make sense of this experience by interpreting the account we have received from our participant. In essence, by engaging in IPA, there is a double hermeneutic cycle occurring – the researcher trying to make sense of the participant account of their sense-making of the experience (Smith, 2008). The final concept for IPA is that of idiography – the detailed examination of a particular case. Idiography formed a central part of this research, as I wanted to understand in detail the experience of moving into the sixth form. As is common with IPA studies, this involved working with a small number of participants in order to collect detailed descriptions of their transition into the sixth form (Smith, *et al.*, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2003). An analysis of the student's experiences provided insights into sixth-form transition, which could then be used to inform school improvement. There are however, areas where the IPA approach was adjusted in order to meet the specific needs of this research project. What follows is further discussion of the central concepts of IPA including how this informed and guided the way my data was collected, analysed and interpreted. This begins with a summary of the fundamental principles that have informed the IPA approach and therefore my study, including the central concepts of phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography.

3.2.1 IPA and phenomenology

To understand the role phenomenology plays in IPA, it is useful to consider briefly the scope of phenomenology as a whole and therefore how IPA is situated within this. Phenomenology aims to recognise what elements make a particular phenomenon special (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). However, not all phenomenological approaches do this in the same way and two main approaches can be described: descriptive (eidetic) and interpretative (hermeneutic) (Lopez & Willis, 2004). The descriptive approach is based on the work of Husserl, which forms the foundation upon which phenomenology was built. The interpretative approach is based on the work of Heidegger and it is within this strand of phenomenology that IPA sits. What follows is a brief summary of each of these traditions and the rationalisation for the use of IPA in this study.

Husserl (1970) proposed a new approach to scientific enquiry that resulted in the development of the descriptive phenomenological approach. In this approach subjective information was considered an important element for scientists trying to understand human motivation because behaviour is influenced by individual's perceptions of reality (Larkin, *et al.*, 2006; Lopez & Willis, 2004). To be able to understand the experiences of participants Husserl insisted that the researcher must put aside all prior knowledge of the subject under consideration in order to be able to identify the essential elements of it.

Husserl argued that we should focus on a given phenomenon carefully, by moving away from the simple everyday experience of something – what he termed ‘the natural attitude’ and instead adopting a phenomenological attitude, which requires us to consider our perceptions of everyday objects or experiences. In order to do this, Husserl developed the phenomenological method referred to as attaining the attitude of phenomenological reduction (Giorgi, 2007, 1997; Moustakas, 1994; Hycner, 1985). This means the researcher is required to:

1. Bracket past knowledge about the phenomenon in order to be able to describe it precisely as intuited (or experienced).
2. To withhold the existential index, which means to consider what is given precisely as it is given, as a presence, or phenomenon.

By completing a number of these reductions, it was Husserl's aim to lead away from a person's own assumptions and presuppositions and back towards the essence of their experience of a given phenomenon. By doing so, it should be possible to describe and reflect on any part of a given phenomenon. In this respect, Husserl was interested in finding the core subjective experience of things, identifying the 'essence' of something. This developed into the 'eidetic reduction', which identifies the features that are common to anyone who has experienced the same phenomenon and are referred to as universal essences or eidetic structures (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

Husserl was an important contributor to the development of IPA as a phenomenological approach. Although he was a philosopher, and not a psychologist, Husserl established several key ideas that underpin phenomenological psychology. This included focusing on an experience and then describing its particular and essential features. However, although identifying the universal essences of transition would be an engaging and interesting task; this approach would not have helped to fulfil the research goals of this study. I wanted to describe in detail the experience of transition of these students from their perspective and be able to offer insights that might help to inform practice in the school. This would not be the result if I had analysed the data based on a number of reductions, as this would not have taken into account the context within which the students were situated. I also questioned whether it was truly possible to identify a universal essence given that we all experience and interpret the world around us through multiple lenses of culture, experience, sociological and psychological factors. To insist that we can find one universal truth or one correct interpretation of experience runs counter to the interpretivist paradigm within which this study is sited. As a result, I felt that an interpretative phenomenological approach was much better suited to the goals of this research.

Heidegger has many areas of commonality with Husserl, but began to take phenomenology in a new direction. To begin with, Heidegger rejected the concept that the sort of reduction proposed by Husserl was possible and that instead phenomenological research should be concerned with interpreting experiences (Tuffour, 2017). The reason for this was that Heidegger felt it was impossible for people to remove themselves from 'being-in-the-world' to achieve the sort of transcendental reductions proposed in descriptive phenomenology (Lopez & Willis, 2004). The impossibility of extracting ourselves from the lifeworld applies to both the researcher and participants and this is acknowledged in interpretative

phenomenology. For the researcher, it is impossible to rid the mind of the knowledge and understanding of a phenomenon that has led them to study this in detail. For the participants, it is the narratives they provide and the interpretations of these that are the focus; as how a person experiences and subsequently describes an event are inextricably linked to their personal contexts. Heidegger therefore resolutely rejects the Cartesian divide between subject and object and instead promotes the concept of Dasein. Dasein means ‘there-being’ and is central to the recognition that we are all, at all times located in, and involved with a particular context (Larkin & Thompson, 2011; Larkin, *et al.*, 2006). Heidegger’s contribution to IPA is that we can conceive of people as thrown into a world of pre-existing objects, relationships and language and that our experience of being in the world is always shaped by our own perspectives, temporal placement and always ‘in relation to something’. This understanding makes the interpretation of people’s meaning-making activities central to the phenomenological inquiry in psychology.

Interpretative phenomenology as first developed by Heidegger underpins IPA and this resonates much more strongly with the research goals of my study and research paradigm. By using IPA, I could recognise and use my prior knowledge of transition to both help design the research and then interpret the experiences shared by the students. This approach also offered the opportunity to reflect on the individual characteristics of each students’ experience whilst also identifying characteristics that were shared. Engaging with the context within which these students were describing these phenomena meant that the insights gained would be much more useful when informing practice. The recognition of the role of the researcher when interpreting the descriptions provided is fundamental to the hermeneutic tradition that forms the second of the three central concepts in IPA. I will discuss this next.

3.2.2 IPA and hermeneutics

As the second of the three key premises for IPA, hermeneutics allows for the phenomenological approach to become interpretive. Heidegger in particular described phenomenology as a hermeneutic enterprise (Tuffour, 2017; Smith, *et al.*, 2009). Hermeneutic analysis attempts to not only consider the descriptions of phenomena but to also interpret meaning associated with these. This is achieved by interpreting the narrative

descriptions provided by participants. For example, in the study by Eatough and Smith (2006) IPA was used to study the role of feelings in emotional experience. In another Smith and Shaw (2017) investigated the experience of being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and how a life-world approach to healthcare would improve opportunities for well-being. This is achieved through engagement with the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle allows us to consider the relationships between the part and whole of something at a series of levels. In this way the interpretation made by the researcher is a blend of the understanding the participant has developed of the phenomenon and that articulated by the researcher (Lopez & Willis, 2004). For example, in the study by Eatough and Smith (2006) they considered the descriptions of anger as presented by their participant, who in order to verbalise this had to first make sense of what she felt and experienced when angry. Following on from this the researchers then, amongst other things, interpreted the role of the body and bodily change as part of what it is to feel emotion. In this way, to understand the part we must look at the whole and to understand the whole we must look at the parts. A key tenant of IPA is that the analysis is iterative and that the data may be approached any number of times from different ways of thinking throughout the analytical process (Smith, *et al.*, 2009). For example, in an educational setting, we might consider how feelings of self-efficacy might alter someone's experience of a phenomenon; equally, the role of teacher and student expectations may also be another lens through which to view the experience. What this hermeneutic approach offered me as a researcher was an opportunity to develop an understanding of what the students moving into the sixth form experienced and how they coped with this. This understanding could then be deepened based on my analysis of their narratives using theoretical constructs. By engaging interpretatively with the accounts of transition, I was able to consider what it had been like for these students to make this transition and what factors influenced this (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This would not have been possible if I had used a descriptive phenomenological approach. Without consideration of the specific context of the school within which the students were transitioning and what they were experiencing, I felt that the outcomes of the research would be of less use to inform potential improvements to the way students are supported through the move into the sixth form.

3.2.3 IPA and idiography

Idiography forms the final element of the IPA approach. It promotes the exploration of single cases in detail before attempting to produce any general statements concerning a phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). IPA, as an idiographic exercise, does not follow a nomothetic approach and so does not claim to make generalisations for populations (Smith, *et al.*, 2009). However, the study of many cases in detail may reveal themes that might provide an insight into larger scale patterns of experience:

From an idiographic perspective, it is important to find levels of analysis which enable us to see patterns across case studies while still recognising the particularities of the individual lives from which those patterns emerge. (Smith, 1999, p. 424)

As IPA is fundamentally idiographic it utilises purposive, small scale sampling, and in some examples, may employ a single case analysis. In relation to this study, the idiographic approach of IPA allowed me to work with a small number of students to collect rich and detailed narratives that could then be explored at length. This offered detailed examples of the effects that a range of factors had on students' experience of transition. By understanding these in detail, it has been possible to make recommendations that, whilst they are made on the experience of a few, should have positive effects on many students moving into the sixth form.

3.2.4 Summary

By combining three distinct elements, IPA offered an approach for studying experience that I felt was particularly relevant for this study and the associated research goals. By working closely with a small number of students and attempting to understand their experience of transition from their own individual perspectives a great deal of insight was possible. By then engaging interpretatively with their narratives it was possible to make meaning from this and begin to understand in detail why their different experiences occurred (Tuffour, 2017; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2008). By working idiographically with a small group of students I was also able to explore, in detail, the complex process of transition and therefore illuminate key elements of this that were particularly important to them (Creswell, 2007). The

fact that the interpretative element of IPA meant that I could engage with my own professional experience and existing theoretical constructs meant that I felt that the insights developed had greater relevance to the practice-based setting of the research. I was able to develop both an understanding of the transition process as understood and articulated by each student as well as contextualising this within a theoretical framework. This produced a detailed insight into transition which a purely descriptive approach would not have achieved (Larkin & Thompson, 2011; Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Larkin, *et al.*, 2006). Using IPA meant that no theoretical constructs were present to be ‘tested’. This meant that the theories I did draw upon could be used flexibly at the interpretative stage of analysis to explore in detail the phenomenon of transition into the sixth form (Smith & Osborn, 2003). It was the application of theory (for example self-efficacy) at the interpretative stage that I felt made IPA the best choice for my study. Its flexible and inductive processes allowed the voice of the participants to remain central and theory only to direct my analysis and interpretation, rather than simply being used to ‘prove’ a pre-existing model or concept.

In order to understand the nature of transition into the sixth form, I needed to gather experiential material. To do this, I used semi-structured interviews as well as collecting shorter accounts of transition that I have called ‘snapshots’. In the following section, I will discuss in more detail the rationale for these choices. I will also demonstrate how I analysed this data.

3.3 Site of research

The site where I carried out my research was a rural upper school. I worked there for ten years. The school takes students from the ages of 13–19. The sixth form is on the main school site and at the time of this study had approximately 250 students.

As issues such as socio-economic rating (Nisbet & Entwistle, 1969) and student self-efficacy (Galton, *et al.*, 2003) were identified as factors that could impact how successful students are through the transition and transfer process, information regarding the number of students who might fall into these categories provide useful contextual information.

The large majority of students were from White British backgrounds. A smaller-than-average proportion of students were supported by the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care, students from armed services families and students known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportions of disabled students and those who had special educational needs were below average. The school met the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

The rural nature of the school in which this study is sited may also have implications on how students view and deal with the transition into the sixth form. Due to the small size of the town the school provides the only secondary and post-16 provision. This means that the students have very few direct peers their own age other than those that they attend school with. As a teacher in this school for many years I have noticed the distinct changes in student outlook after transition into the sixth form. I believe that this is in large part due to the fact that once in the sixth form, students for the first time begin to consider their performance in relation to peers outside of their local setting.

Students in this town are likely to have spent large portions (if not all) of their academic careers with the same group of peers. This small community of similarly-aged students extends beyond the school and exerts itself all facets of students' lives including when they enter part-time work, engage in clubs or other extra-curricular activities and of course social events. Due to this, social comparison amongst these students has occurred over a prolonged period. The desire to compare ourselves to others stems from our drive to self-evaluate and the need for this evaluation to be based on comparisons with the people we encounter (Festinger, 1954). As a result of these comparisons we tend to begin to join groups of people with whom we share similar opinions or abilities. These groupings – particularly those based on ability tend to be fairly stable and are maintained over time. Comparison with others can offer a way for individuals to develop coping strategies or indeed adapt their behaviour to improve their performance. Depending on our circumstances we make comparisons with people who we feel are both better and worse off than ourselves (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007; Buunk, Collins, Taylor, VanYperen, & Dakof, 1990). Upward comparisons of our abilities, such as to those achieving better grades can help us to make adaptations to our behaviour resulting in better academic performances (Gibbons et al., 2002; Ybema & Buunk, 1993). Equally, we also make comparisons with those we feel who are worse off than ourselves.

Often this helps us to cope with challenging situations as we feel reassured that there are others in a more difficult position, and by contrast with these individuals we are doing better (Buunk et al., 1990). Whilst the students at this school will of course be able to make social comparisons with their peers and benefit from both upward and downward comparison, the limited population within which they can do this may result in fewer interactions from which they can derive benefit in comparison with a more diverse population in a larger town or city. In contrast, once students reach the sixth form, and begin to consider applications for higher education, further education, work or apprenticeships they are beginning to make direct comparisons with peers from outside of their normal sphere. This seems to have an invigorating effect on many of the students who realise that their performance is now being measured against many new individuals. In essence, providing a significant boost, or ‘upward drive’ to their performance (Festinger, 1954).

During year 11 and their preparations for their final GCSE examinations, students commonly have amorphous goals, such as ‘do well’. At the time of this study for entry into the sixth form to study A Levels, students required five or more passes at C grade or above and students wishing to study Level 2 (GCSE equivalent) courses did not require any fixed number of passes or grades. As a result of this, students often struggled to find sufficient motivation as they had few specific goals and had limited opportunities to demonstrate particular competencies (Ames, 1992; Nicholls, 1989; Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, 1984). In addition to this, the huge pressure on schools and therefore teachers to fulfil particular performative criteria often resulted in few opportunities for students to be autonomous and direct their own learning (Niemic & Ryan, 2009; Stefanou et al., 2004; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). A lack of autonomy, increased levels of coercion and external regulation of learning can result in a fall in motivation (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). The sixth form however, provides numerous opportunities for students to develop specific and time-limited goals for themselves. All of the routes open to them after the sixth form, whether in further education, higher education or work are likely to require specific outcomes from their sixth form courses. As a result of this, students have the opportunity to develop greater autonomy via the subjects they opt to study and the routes they choose to take after school. As with the opportunity to compare themselves with new peers, this choice and increase in valence of their courses seemed to have a significantly positive effect on student outlook.

By understanding the nature of student transition into the sixth form, findings from this exploratory study could be used to inform later school interventions. In order that the findings from this study be both useful and communicable, I will address below the steps I took to ensure this was the case.

3.4 Transparency and communicability

The terms reliability and validity are usually used in relation to quantitative research and they are not the most appropriate for use here. This is particularly the case with a phenomenological study as the terms reliability and validity are an attempt to reinforce the objectivity of the measures undertaken (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). However, the underlying premise of a phenomenological study is to understand the subjective experience of individuals. As such, I feel the terms ‘transparency’ and ‘communicability’ used by Rubin and Rubin (1995) are much more appropriate. I have tried to consider each of these terms throughout this chapter. To deal with the issue of transparency, I ensured that the steps taken to arrive at the interpretation of the data were both clear and explicit. To make the work communicable, the themes and constructs developed had to be clear to others. In order to help with this, I worked with colleagues to provide checks for transparency. The ethical implications of this will be discussed in the ethics section. To make the research design as clear as possible, I considered a range of issues associated with the data collection and analysis and made explicit the rationale for these decisions. The areas I will consider include:

- sampling strategy
- sample selection and recruitment
- ethical considerations
- the way in which the qualitative data was analysed.

3.4.1 Sampling

To collect data that represents the transition process, I had to ensure that my data sampling fell within the time at which transition effects may be present. As highlighted in their extensive review of the transition and transfer literature, Galton, Gray & Rudduck (1999) found the transition experience is centred on a range of short-term issues and concerns associated with the challenges of a new school setting. There were only a small number of students for whom transfer had any lasting negative impacts. These short-term issues are usually all but negligible by the Christmas after the transition or transfer. Cotterell (1992), further breaks down this transition period into phases within which my sampling could be usefully spread. The first phase is an initial reaction phase where students get used to the new aspects of their educational setting. This usually lasts for the first month or two. The second phase is the consolidation phase where students have established routines in reaction to the changes they have faced. This phase usually lasts for the remainder of the first term after the transition or transfer point.

Due to the part-time nature of the EdD I was fortunate to have an extended period to complete my data collection. This meant that I was able to work with two cohorts of students – the first group transitioned into the sixth form in September 2013 and the second group in September 2014. To capture information about transition across the academic year (so ensuring no lasting impacts were missed) and without over burdening the students with excess interviews or myself with too much data to process, I decided that two interviews with each student was appropriate. To ensure that I gathered data from across the transition experience I timed the interviews with each cohort differently. For the first cohort the first interview was carried out in November 2013 to capture information within the initial reaction phase. Their second interview was carried out in April 2014, which offered them the opportunity to look back on their experience and capture any experiences because of the consolidation phase. For the second cohort, who made the transition in September 2014, their first interview was in January 2015 to capture both the initial and consolidation phases. Their second interview in July 2015 offered a truly retrospective view of the whole process in order to identify any experiences that might occur in the transition to the sixth form that were unique to this event and therefore would not be well described by Cotterell (1992) or Galton, Gray & Rudduck (1999).

3.4.2 Sample Selection and recruitment

The participant sample for the interviews was drawn from three year 12 form groups in each of the two cohorts I collected data from. Cohort one made the transition into the sixth form in September 2013 and cohort two in September 2014. IPA samples tend to be purposively selected and homogenous in order to gain access to the phenomenon under investigation. In this way the samples chosen represent a particular perspective rather than a population (Smith, *et al.*, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2003). In my case that meant ensuring that the students selected from those who volunteered had all previously attended the school in year 11 and were enrolled on courses that were classroom based. The only heterogeneity I introduced to gain a slightly different perspective was the opportunity to talk to students who were taking Level 2 (GCSE) equivalent courses as well as those taking traditional A Level (Level 3) courses. The reason for this was to capture the perspectives of both groups of students so that any relevant recommendations could be made for practice.

To recruit my participants for the interviews I used form time to share with three year 12 form groups the rationale for my study and that I wanted to work with a small group of students to better understand what it was like for them to make the transition into the sixth form. I used this time to also show them some of the sorts of questions I would be likely to ask in the interviews and also explained how long they would be and the fact that they would take place in free periods, not after school or lunchtime. I then asked students who were interested to pass their names to their form tutor. Having gained a number of volunteers, I selected from them students who shared common free periods with me. In both cohorts, that resulted in more than the six students I needed, so in this case I made my final selection to ensure I had equal numbers of males and females, and if possible similar subject choices. I then followed up with each of the selected students to see if they were still happy to take part in the study. All of them were, and it was at this stage that I provided each of them with a more detailed information leaflet outlining the study and what it entailed (see appendix 9.1).

The reason for the small interview sample size in IPA studies is a reflection of the idiographic nature of the analyses. The focus is always on the detailed reading, and interpretation of the individual case (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). A large data set would run counter to this and also may result in the loss of '*potentially subtle inflections of meaning*' (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 626). In addition to this, simply the time-consuming nature and richness of the data

would have rendered a large sample impracticable. I proposed therefore to work with six students in each cohort, making a total of 12 students and 24 interviews over the entire period of research. However, two students in the second cohort withdrew, resulting in four students in cohort two and therefore ten students overall.

3.4.3 Participants

As the context for each individual is an important element of the analysis of their narratives (Larkin & Thompson, 2011; Larkin, *et al.*, 2006), a brief overview of each of the participants is useful. When considering what information to use to help to contextualise my student narratives I considered information both from the literature on school transition as well as that on IPA. Both of these helped me to decide what useful information I could provide. There is little directly written in the literature on what personal contextual information should be collected about individuals participating in research (Smith, 2011; Smith et al., 2009; Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Smith, 2004). I therefore took my cue from the examples of studies which had used IPA to see what information they had collected and presented about their participants.

Most of the studies using IPA as a methodology presented very little personal contextual information about their participants. For example, in their work about learning to live with Parkinson's disease in the family, Smith and Shaw (2017) simply presented a table of participant data which included their pseudonym, gender, age, whether they were the patient or partner and finally how many years it had been since the diagnosis of Parkinson's disease. More information was provided about the participant involved in the study of anger by Eatough and Smith (2006, p. 486):

'Marilyn was 30 years old, and living with her partner John and their son Andrew in a council home in an inner-city area of the Midlands. In terms of social need the area is categorized as extreme and has correspondingly high levels of crime. Marilyn left school at 16 and has worked in a variety of unskilled jobs. Since having Andrew, she does not work outside the home'.

In another example investigating the personal experience of juvenile Huntington's disease (Smith et al., 2006, p. 487), there was a larger number of participants as in my study. In this instance their personal contextual information was summarised using quantitative data about their shared characteristics:

'The majority of participants were female (75%). The majority of affected parents were male (83%), and the majority of affected parents were also no longer alive (83%). The affected children were predominantly teenagers (59% were aged 10–20 years), whilst the remainder were currently over 20 years old (33%) or under 10 years old (8%).'

Finally, in an IPA study considering the role of humour in pedagogy (Noon, 2017, p. 46) another brief summary of the participants was utilised:

'Participants were between 35 and 65 years of age, and emanated from a range of professional backgrounds, including primary education, educational management, and social work.'

All of these summaries of participants from IPA studies show a range of approaches to contextualising the persons participating. What they all had in common was that the data provided was focused on the area under consideration. I therefore used this as a guide when looking at the literature on transition to consider the most useful relevant information for my own participants.

To help me decide which contextual data might be most useful, I went back to the literature on transition and transfer to see what features commonly affected students. These included factors such as:

- Socio-economic rating (Nisbet & Entwistle, 1969)
- Parental involvement (Nisbet & Entwistle, 1969; Galton et al., 2003)
- Increased academic demands (Galton et al., 2003; Boaler, William & Brown, 2000; Doddington, Flutter & Rudduck, 1999; Anderman & Maehr, 1994)
- Examination pressure (Boaler, William & Brown, 2000; Doddington, Flutter & Rudduck, 1999)
- Ambition (Nisbet & Entwistle, 1969)

It became obvious that I would have to be sensitive about the information I wanted to gather about the participants in my research. As teachers, we have access to very little personal information about students. What information we do have tends to focus on prior academic performance and if relevant, may cover medical or specific educational needs. Details about socio-economic rating, familial situation or siblings is not provided. This would mean that if I wanted to collect information about any of these things, I would have to ask the students in the interviews. This raised both ethical and methodological issues.

As an insider in my institution, asking a young person to reveal information about their family circumstances or socio-economic could cause a number of problems. On a very basic level, when asking about factors such as socio-economic rating, it was highly probable that the students were unlikely to know what their parents or guardians earned. This meant that they were unlikely to be able to provide accurate information in this regard. Asking such information could also imply judgement. As an individual within their own institution, who could potentially reveal this information to others, students could have felt fearful sharing this sort of information (Shah, 2004). As an insider asking about potentially sensitive information I may also have been at risk from encouraging students to distort their responses. Unlike an outsider, I would have continued to have contact with these students, and others who knew them after the completion of this research. They are therefore likely to have only shared information that would have had a positive impact on this relationship (Preedy & Riches, 1988). The reason for this is that students would have held a number of preconceptions of me based on our prior interactions. In the relationships between myself and each of my participants much of the power lay with me (as an adult, teacher and interviewer), and as such I had to be very aware that when asked sensitive questions, or those that may have implied judgement, it is likely students have 'told me what I wanted to hear' (Mercer, 2007).

Methodologically, asking contextual questions also raised issues for me. I wanted the focus of the interviews to be the students' experiences of transition. Whilst collecting contextual information was useful to support my later analyses, I did not want to ask questions that might prevent the interviews being an opportunity for the participants to '*tell their own stories, in their own words*' (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 57). As such, I wanted to ensure that the questions asked in the interviews allowed the students and their experiences to become the focus. Although I could have asked contextual questions at the ends of the interviews, I did not want students to leave feeling that although I had apparently listened

diligently, that somehow they didn't quite tell me everything I wanted to know. Doing so would have felt disingenuous and also fail to fulfil the purpose of an IPA interview which is '*not about collecting facts, it is about exploring meanings*' (Larkin & Thompson, 2011, p. 104). In each interview as much as possible all pre-existing concerns or theories on behalf of the interviewer should be put to one side and data is collected in the natural setting of the participant (Tuffour, 2017; Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006; Lopez & Willis, 2004).

It would therefore seem challenging for me to collect contextualised data which may inform the first two factors listed above. The final three however, could be more easily gathered based on the academic data available on the students. Although examination outcomes are not exact proxies for any of the final three points, they can provide useful context on them. How students have dealt with, and performed in their prior examinations gives us a sense of how they have dealt so far with the increasing academic demands in their school careers and also the associated pressure. Destination data is also available for our students, and this gives us some information regarding their ambition for the future and the steps they will have had to undertake to achieve these. What follows is the contextual data for each of the students who have participated in the interviews as part of this study. Each participant is listed in alphabetical order.

Anna

Anna was a successful student at GCSE, gaining A grades for both English and mathematics as well as nine other GCSE qualifications ranging from grades A to B. At the end of her time in the sixth form Anna had achieved two B grades at A Level and one A grade. She had studied science A Levels as she wanted to apply for a degree in medicine. She planned to take a gap year to gain experience volunteering with medical providers before applying to university the following year.

Ben

Ben achieved a C grade for mathematics and a B grade for English at GCSE. He also achieved seven additional GCSE qualifications ranging from grades B to D. Ben took both traditional A Levels, as well AS Level 3 equivalent courses. By the end of the sixth form, he had gained two merits and a D grade. Ben wanted to read history at university before gaining his PGCE to become a teacher.

Charlie

Charlie achieved a D grade in mathematics and D grade in English at GCSE as well as eight additional GCSE qualifications ranging from grades B to D. Charlie also took a mixture of A Levels and Level 3 equivalent courses and achieved a pass and D grade by the end of the sixth form. He intended to take a degree level apprenticeship in engineering after leaving school.

Claire

Claire gained a C in mathematics and an A in English at GCSE; she also achieved seven other GCSE qualifications ranging from grades A to B. At A Level, Claire achieved a C and two B grades and planned to attend university to read a humanities degree.

Emily

Emily was the highest achiever in the participant group. She attained A grades in mathematics and English as well as nine additional GCSEs ranging from grades A* to B. At A Level, she achieved three B grades and was applying to read biology at university.

Harry

Harry gained a B grade in mathematics and an A grade in English as well as nine additional GCSEs ranging from grades A to C. At the end of his A Levels, Harry had achieved two B grades and a C grade and was planning to attend university to read history.

James

James was the first of two participants who were taking Level 2 (GCSE) equivalent courses. The reason he was doing this was that he failed to achieve five or more A* to C passes at GCSE, which was the entry requirement for A Level courses. James gained an F grade in mathematics and a C grade in English. He also gained eight other GCSEs ranging from grades E to C. As well as re-sitting his GCSE mathematics, James also gained a merit allowing him to leave the sixth form after a year to go to college to study film.

Liz

Liz achieved a C grade in mathematics and an A grade in English at GCSE. She also achieved six additional GCSE qualifications ranging from grades A to C. At the end of her A

Levels, Liz had passes at E, C and B grades. She was applying to university to read a sports science degree.

Nancy

Nancy gained a B grade in mathematics and an A* in English. She also achieved six additional GCSE qualifications ranging from grades A to C. At the end of her A Levels, Nancy had two C grades and a D grade and was applying to university to read a humanities degree.

Owen

Owen was the second participant to be studying Level 2 (GCSE equivalent) qualifications. He gained a C grade in mathematics and a D grade in English. He gained eight other GCSE qualifications ranging from grades C to G. Having completed his Level 2 courses, Owen remained in the sixth form to study A Levels.

3.5 Methods

IPA research most commonly utilises semi-structured interviews as the way to gather rich narratives from participants (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Lopez & Willis, 2004). In addition to the semi-structured interviews I carried out, I also wanted to collect some data from a larger cohort of students. This additional data was not collected in order to support any attempt to generalise and it was not used at all as part of the interpretation of the narratives gathered from the main participants. The reason I did decide to collect this sort of data was in response to the practice-based nature of this study. Schools are resource poor, both in terms of monetary resource and also staff time and capacity. Based on my research I wanted to be able to offer some recommendations for the ways we could support students through transition. Inevitably, therefore, I could foresee that there would be colleagues who would question the strength of these given such a small sample size and without a foundation in the philosophical approach of IPA. I wanted therefore to have additional data available that might demonstrate that patterns present in the interviewee data could also resonate amongst a larger cross-section of students. In no way were these meant to offer any sort of validation for the interpretations from the narratives provided by participants, but simply an opportunity to reflect on the fact that similar life-experiences may be present for other students too.

3.5.1 Interviews

Like most phenomenological research I used interviews to collect detailed student narratives about their experience of the transition into the sixth form (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Larkin, *et al.*, 2006; Lopez & Willis, 2004). Denscombe (2007) provides a thought provoking summary of why interviews provide such a useful research tool. These advantages include the depth of information and insight provided; the flexibility offered by interviews and the high response rates. All of these I felt were of particular importance given the phenomenological nature of the research and the attempt to understand what the experience of transition was like for students. It was very important to consider the role of the interview within my study. In phenomenological research, the interview can be used one of two ways: first as a means of gathering and exploring experiential narrative material, and second to develop a conversational relation with the interviewee about the meaning of an experience (Van Manen, 1990). In my study, I used the interview to develop and gather experiential narrative material so that I could understand what the experience of transition was like for my participants and therefore ‘giving voice’ to the phenomenon that was the focus for this study (Larkin & Thompson, 2011). Most of the interviews with the students lasted 20 to 30 minutes and were carried out in classrooms. Before the first interviews began, I explained what we were going to discuss and took time to allow the students to get comfortable. All of the interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone so I could give my full attention to the participants and what they were describing.

In order to stay close to the experience, it was helpful to provide some concrete points for the students to develop their narratives around. These took the form of prompts to help them think of specific instances, situations and events to help explore the experience of transition (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). I felt that prompts were particularly important when working with students as the situation of being interviewed and speaking about their experience of education was unusual and they were likely to need more support than an adult to help them frame and share their experiences (Smith, 1999). Although it was useful to develop a series of open questions to help students develop a full account, as these interviews were unstructured, I was also ready for these prompts not be used as the interviewee’s account developed (Moustakas, 1994). Further to this, the aim for me as the interviewer was to be neutral and facilitative and therefore the prompts were designed to draw out detail from the participants’ accounts rather than to lead them to discuss particular elements of their

experience. Some examples of the interview prompts I used are shown below. All were designed to encourage the students to describe their experiences and where possible to expand upon their ideas and attempt to explain in their own words what the transition was like for them. This follows the inductive nature of a phenomenological study where the researcher and participant try to make sense of the phenomenon. The first step in this process was to encourage the participant to make sense of this event and then share this through their narrative. This was supported by the fact that each of the ten students were given more than one opportunity to discuss their experiences. By having two interviews for each student it was possible for them to describe not only different elements of their experiences, but also how these elements changed, gained or lost importance, or informed their experiences in different ways over time.

Examples of interview prompts:

- Can you describe what the move from year 11 to year 12 was like for you?
- Can you tell me about how the sixth form is different from your experience of year 11?
- What sort of learning activities do you do in lessons?
- What were the main challenges for you about moving into the sixth form?
- What elements of moving into the sixth form did you enjoy the most?

These sorts of questions, which encourage participants to share and describe their experiences, are common in IPA studies. For example, in their work on living with Parkinson's disease Smith and Shaw (2017) asked questions like '*Can you describe your feelings when you were diagnosed with Parkinson's disease?*' and '*Tell me about a typical day, living with Parkinson's disease*'. In their work on understanding the feelings of anger, Eatough and Smith (2006) asked questions like '*Can you recall what it felt like?*' and '*What do you think brought about the change?*'.

The interviews produced a range of issues that I intend to explore in more detail in the following sections. On a purely practical basis, the interviews were time consuming. They required time to meet, conduct, transcribe and analyse (Frankfort-Nachmias, 1996; Burton & Bartlett, 2005; Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007; Denscombe, 2007). The main drawbacks of interviews were in the complexity of planning for and managing the ethical issues associated

with them. I also worked with colleagues to help me during the analysis stage of my study. I invited them to help validate the themes I identified in the student interviews. I had to consider the burden I placed on them as well as the students involved. I also had to consider how best to manage student anonymity and to ensure students were comfortable with the interview situation and their participation in the research. All of these issues will be discussed at more length in the ethics section.

3.5.2 Snapshot data

In addition to the use of interviews, I wanted to gather a wider spread of additional experiential information from a broader range of students. The collection of data from a larger population of students may seem controversial in a phenomenological study that, by its very nature is committed to the idiographic. However, I felt that data of this type was important to ensure that the findings I developed would be useful for practice. I was very aware in my own institution of people who would be very quick to dismiss any findings from a study with such a small sample size as that which has been utilised here. It was my hope therefore that if I could show that the sorts of experiences discussed by the interview participants also resonated with those shared in the snapshots, then the analyses from the interviews could not simply be dismissed on the basis of the sample size. By collecting the snapshot data I wanted to explicitly demonstrate that there was value in studying the individual to gain greater insight into the whole. What I must emphasise however is that the snapshot data was not used in any way as part of the analytical work resulting in the identification of themes from the interview data. These are the bedrock of this thesis and no attempt has been made to generalise from these using the snapshot data. Instead, it was my hope that the snapshot data would in effect provided an echo chamber for the themes identified from the interviews. They were intended therefore to improve the communicability of my work by allowing readers not familiar with this paradigm, or research with such small sample sizes to realise that by understanding, in detail, the experiences of a small number of people, we may be better able to understand the experiences of a wider population.

The snapshot data also supported me as a researcher during the interpretative work with the interview data. As a lone researcher, the wider snapshot data helped me to sense-check the

themes that I developed based on my analysis of the individual participants' narratives. Their short accounts of transition and the themes identified from them allowed me to see where there was commonality and where there was dissonance across a population wider than just my ten participants.

I worked with three form groups from the cohort making the transition in September 2013 to collect snapshot data. It was important to ensure that students felt that they were being invited to participate should they want to, rather than it being a requirement. In order for the students to give informed consent about whether they wanted to participate, I shared with them the rationale for collecting the information. This included how it would be stored, used and who would see it. The students who then still wished to participate did so around the same time as the interviews were carried out (November 2013 and April 2014). As for the interviews, this split sampling was designed so that students could reflect on their experiences across the period of transition. The short snapshots were completed them in form time so that it did not impinge upon their free time or lessons.

To collect the snapshot accounts I invited all students who wanted to participate to use small A6-sized record cards to record short statements about their experiences of transition. This resulted in 45 responses from the first data collection point and 37 from the second. To stimulate their responses, they were shown the same interview prompts that were provided for the interviewees. These short responses therefore formed mini interviews where students could record as little or as much as they wanted to in relation to the questions. These cards were then analysed as described in section 3.8.

3.6 Ethical considerations

I have alluded to some of my ethical considerations already, but within this section, I intend to explore these issues in greater depth. As with all research, I abided by the ethical considerations as set out by the British Educational Research Association (2011). The BERA guidelines may be summarised as follows: all educational research should consider and show respect for the person, knowledge, democratic values, the quality of educational research and academic freedom. As a practitioner researcher, I also faced a number of unique ethical

considerations that I will consider subsequently. The most important ethical factors I considered were linked to my role as an insider. This insider role casts difficulties in terms of working with students, other staff and guaranteeing anonymity. It is each of these three areas I will consider in this section.

3.6.1 Insider research and working with students

As my research involved gathering the views of students, it was necessary to consider what data should be collected in order to prevent the research impinging unnecessarily on the respondents (Briggs & Coleman, 2002). As such I needed to balance the benefits of the data I collected against the imposition upon the respondents (Frankfort-Nachmias, 1996). Such considerations were central to the design and conduct of my research, as I will demonstrate in this section.

The role of any researcher whether insider or outsider brings with it ethical considerations and issues that need to be dealt with reflexively. In my case, as a teacher conducting research in my own institution I was certainly what would be considered an insider researcher. My work within the school, in particular as a member of the sixth form pastoral team and as a sixth form subject tutor meant that I had *'a lived familiarity with the group being researched'* (Griffith, 1998, p. 361). In addition to being an insider by virtue of my position as a teacher in the school, I was also an insider in this instance due to the fact that I had been a student in the institution I was studying and had experienced the same transition that the students I was interviewing had. In essence I was a 'double-insider'. Being in this position meant that I had to be reflexive throughout my research to ensure that I did not make any assumptions based on my familiarity with the setting or experience being considered.

Insider research offers many benefits, including: a more detailed level of understanding afforded by prior knowledge; close and regular contact with that being researched; a more rapid establishment of rapport and trust with participants and more open communication because of the researchers ongoing contact (Taylor, 2011). However, as an insider, I had to ensure that I did not take for granted the data collected, and that I did not fall into the trap of failing to ask the 'obvious question'. In particular I was very aware that I needed the

participants to fully develop their narratives of transition to ensure that I did not fill in elements of their accounts with my own professional or personal knowledge (Hockey, 1993). In addition to this, students' accounts may be different when relayed to an insider researcher rather than an outsider. They will have preconceptions about what they think my opinions are and so this may influence their accounts of their transition.

As much as I was an insider, I could also have been considered in some respects an outsider to these students. I am an adult, in a position of relative power to them, so whilst I was emerged in the general school culture we all shared, I was not privy to their peer relationships, or their individual relationships with their teachers. Whilst I have taught some of the students, others have had almost no direct contact with me. The students may have also been more prone to providing an overly positive view given my interest in this area and also the fact that I was a member of the sixth form pastoral team. As such my identity within this research could be considered as 'liquid':

Researchers are both inside and outside the learning environment, and inside and outside of the phenomena under investigation. Research may require us to distance ourselves and yet at the same time to become immersed. We are neither complete observers nor complete participants, but often working in that 'third space' in between. (McNess, Arthur, & Crossley, 2015, p. 311).

During the stages of data analysis I was very aware of making sure that I in no way attempted to shape the participant's accounts of transition to agree with my own view of this phenomena, either as a past student or teacher, but instead try to understand them as best I could (Gadamer, 1975).

It was clear that careful consideration of my professional role and personal experience was required at all stages of the research so that I did not impose my experiences or interpretations, but instead allowed the participants' narratives to remain at the fore. In order to do this I took many steps at different stages of the research to remain as reflexive as possible. In the first instance this involved the design of the semi-structured interviews. As well as the main questions, I also included prompts to help me encourage students to develop their answers as well as reminders to myself to ask probing questions to help me elicit as much detail as possible from their experiences. Equally during the interviews, I was very

cognisant of my power relationship and tried as much as possible to reassure the students that these conversations were open and that no judgement would be made about them or people discussed. To help this before I began the questions in the first interview I explained why I was interested in their experiences and how I would use the information provided. Having a second interview with each student was also an excellent way to help establish trust and openness as it was clear that between the two, nothing they had shared in the first interview had been divulged. During the interviews I was also careful that if students were unable to give detailed answers, I did stray from questions that were useful to probe to those that were leading. Where I felt this may have happened in the interviews, I stopped that particular line of questioning and moved to another element to ensure that the participant's narrative remained the focus, rather than my prompts.

During the data analysis I was particularly aware of making sure that my own professional and personal experiences did not impinge on the close reading or the development of themes from the participant's accounts. To help with this I made notes of interesting points or related ideas as I transcribed the interviews and snapshot data. I also did this after the first re-reading of each transcript. By highlighting my initial responses and any pre-conceptions I may have had allowed me to be reflexive. Identifying my pre-existing knowledge, understanding and responses to each narrative allowed me to highlight any particular points that I needed to be careful to bracket off. In this way I could ensure that I remained as open as possible to the narrative account of each participant.

Informed consent lies at the heart of ethical research. Asking respondents whether they wish to participate shows respect for the right of self-determination. However, informed consent assumes that respondents are competent enough to make well informed choices (Frankfort-Nachmias, 1996). It was my role as the researcher to ensure that I provided respondents with sufficient information to make informed choices about their participation. Voluntariness is a particular issue with insider research. As teachers we are constantly cast in the role of wishing to educationally benefit students (Pritchard, 2002). This role may place unnecessary pressure on students to agree to participate in research, or to participate unquestioningly. Such responses raise issues of both competence and voluntariness. In order to do my best to counteract such problems I provided every student with two key pieces of information. The first was a PowerPoint presentation I used when recruiting my sample and the second was a more detailed leaflet covering the key areas of my research and the underlying rationale (see

appendices 9.1 and 9.2). I also sought individual consent from the students involved in the interview process and snapshot data.

As an insider researcher working with students, I was also in a position to affect school change because of the information they provided. At various stages in the data collection phase of the project, I shared my developing findings with colleagues in school. It was my hope that these findings would help provide information for school improvement and policy direction. It was important to ensure that students realised that their contributions may have a positive impact on their own experiences in the sixth form, as well as on those that followed them. Information about how their views might be used for school improvement was provided to students as part of the informed consent procedure. This helped to ensure that students knew how the information they provide might be utilised. This also meant that they fully realised the nature of the audience for their data, in particular, that the findings from the research would be shared with other teachers within their institution. Realising that their contributions were valued and important to not only my research, but to helping school improvement, may also go some way to recompense the students in terms of the time that they gave to the project.

3.6.2 Insider research and working with colleagues

As a practitioner researcher, I also needed to be aware of the ethical considerations associated with working with other members of staff. Through the process of research, what most teachers engage in as an informal quest to study their own practice becomes something that is formal and public. In doing this, practitioner researchers are inevitably going to rearrange existing relationships (Anderson, *et al.*, 2007). This was true in my case as I worked with colleagues as part of the checking process. They reviewed my emerging themes by reading the interview data and identifying those that they agreed or disagreed with. This involved taking a leading role with them which may have not been present in our previous interactions. It was particularly important to consider this hierarchical change in our relationship. I of course had a personal interest in the success of the research and devoted a significant amount of time and energy to it. I had to consider that I did not have the same right to demand this type of input from my colleagues (Pritchard, 2002). In order to keep my demands upon staff

to a minimum I asked people to participate in a completely voluntary way. I provided them with an overview of my research timeline and discussed with each of them the type and volume of work that they might need to do. By doing so, I hoped to provide staff with sufficient information to help them make an informed and competent decision about whether or not to participate in the research.

3.6.3 Insider research and anonymity

Anonymity was one of the hardest issues to deal with as the data was collected *via* interviews. This was also further complicated as the audience for the findings were others within my own institution. It was therefore essential to maintain anonymity as the negative effect of being identified as a source could be compounded as those that may have identified the sources were located within their institution and therefore could be in a greater position to do harm (Pritchard, 2002). As teaching professionals, I was fortunate that both my colleagues and I were familiar with the need for anonymity. I also explained the reasons why anonymity was required so that we could ensure no student interviewees were placed at risk from harm due to the disclosure of a source. Further to this, each interviewee was given a document before the first interview, explaining the way in which the data would be used and stored. To further ensure anonymity, students were asked to select for themselves a pseudonym that could be used when reporting on the data. In addition to anonymity, to preserve confidentiality, all recordings of interviews were stored by me, and colleagues working with me would not be told names of students. No colleague was given material to review if they had taught the student.

3.7 Data analysis

The analysis carried out in an IPA study can be described as a double hermeneutic circle. This is because first participants have to make meaning of their experience and articulate this in their narrative and then second the researcher has to decode this and make sense of what the participant is saying, trying to understand the phenomenon from their perspective (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In this section, I will describe how I approached this process.

The first thing to acknowledge is that the analysis is an interpretation of the participants' narratives and there could be any number of interpretations of this depending upon the focus of the research. Through my analyses, I hoped to make it clear how I arrived at these interpretations and how these might be useful to inform practice in schools to support students through transition into the sixth form. What follows is an account of how I undertook the analysis of the data provided by both the interviewees and those students who shared their experiences of transition *via* the snapshot data. Before any analysis was carried out, each interview was transcribed *verbatim* and each item of snapshot data was also recorded *verbatim*, including pauses, and other affectations, for example laughter or sighing.

Table 3.1 below is a chronological summary of the analytical process I undertook on both the interviews and the snap shot data. Further detail for the steps are provided in the sections that follow.

Time	Work done with interview transcripts	Work done with snapshot data
Beginning of data analysis	Step one Transcription of each interview (two per participant, 20 in total)	No work on the snapshot data was carried out at this time
	Step two Re-reading of each transcript and free coding	
	Step three Line-by-line reading of each transcript and identification of units of meaning	
	Step four Emerging themes developed for each transcript	
	Step five Super-ordinate themes were identified for each participant	
	Step six A final set of themes were established for the whole cohort of interview participants	

Time	Work done with interview transcripts	Work done with snapshot data
End of data analysis	No work on the interview data was carried out at this time	Step one Reading of each snapshot card and free coding
		Step two Line-by-line reading of each snap shot card and identification of units of meaning
		Step three Emerging themes developed for each snap shot card
		Step four Super-ordinate themes were identified across the cohort
		Step five A final set of themes are established for the whole cohort of snap shot data participants
	The final themes from the interviews were compared with those established from the snap shot data. Where these resonated with one another were identified (see Table 6.1)	

Table 3.1: Chronology of the steps taken in the analytical process

3.7.1 Step one

The first step in the analysis of each interview was the transcription. I transcribed every interview in the study from my interview recordings. As already described this was done *verbatim*, including affectations like laughter as well as pauses. Once the transcriptions were complete, I listened to each twice more whilst reading to final transcript to ensure that nothing had been missed.

Listening to the interviews in such a detailed way offered a very early insight into the data and allowed me the opportunity to note points of interest very early in the process.

Transcribing the interviews also gave me an intimate knowledge of what had been said by each participant. I often had to listen to parts of the recording several times to ensure I had recorded each account accurately and as such my knowledge of what had been said was

improved as a result. Transcribing also offered me an excellent opportunity to be reflexive. If I encountered something that surprised me, or that thought was particularly resonant, I made notes of these. By doing this, once I began the early stages of the data analysis I was able to add these notes to my lists of other pre-conceptions to help me bracket them off in readiness for the later stages of analysis.

3.7.2 Step two

The second step in the analysis was a re-reading of the two transcripts for each student to familiarise myself with their account. In order to surface and identify any of my own preconceptions I noted down any points of interest, immediate responses and reactions to what the student had said, recording these where relevant on the transcript. This ‘free coding’ allowed me to be reflexive during the interpretative process (Larkin & Thompson, 2011). By highlighting any pre-conceptions at this point, I could be aware right at the start of the analysis of any lens I might be applying to the narrative based on my pre-existing knowledge and understanding of this phenomenon. Whilst it was impossible to bracket off all pre-existing knowledge, when working with the narratives of my participants I wanted to remain open-minded and identify any pre-conceptions early on. This meant I could be reflexive and ensure that as far as possible these were minimised in my interpretation, giving the participant the opportunity to share their experience (Larkin, *et al.*, 2006).

3.7.3 Step three

Having completed the free coding, the next step involved working on a new copy of the two transcripts for each student with no annotations or notes. This stage in the analysis involved a line-by-line reading of the transcript with notes made on any elements of the narrative that demonstrated things that had been significant for the participant. For example changing relationships, key events, how they coped with the changes and their thoughts and feelings on the elements of the sixth form they encountered. At this stage I did not attempt to establish any themes or interpretations, I was only identifying units of meaning that shared a sense of the experience of transition so that I could understand this from the perspective of the student

(Smith, *et al.*, 2009). Table 3.2 shows an example of how this was done, in this part of his second interview James is talking about how he had to take on more responsibility.

Original transcript	Exploratory comments
<p>Interviewer: <i>How are you managing the extra responsibility your teachers have been giving you?</i></p> <p>It was hard at first, it was a big change, it took me quite a while to get used to it, it was a big shock like whoa, I have to do all of this work and I have to do this by myself in my own time. And it was good for me to tell myself like right you need to crack on now, you need to do work. You couldn't be messing about like you could in the lower years. So it was quite a shock and it was quite hard, but as you get used to it and move on more in the sixth form it becomes easier and you get used to it.</p>	<p><i>The change in teacher expectation was significant.</i></p> <p><i>The change in teacher expectations forced James to take more responsibility for his own work.</i></p> <p><i>He was self-evaluating and realising his old patterns of behaviour were no longer appropriate.</i></p> <p><i>Developing new ways of working helped him to cope with the changes.</i></p>
<p>Interviewer: <i>How were you able to change so quickly as a student between year 11 and year 12?</i></p> <p>You just see, like when you come into the common room and into school in your own clothes you feel like your own person, you feel like today I'm going to do this and do that and I'm not going to mess around, and it's sort of like a very mature sort of sense you get from going into the sixth form, it's very different from how it was. It's really weird, you get like a feeling and it's like of maturity and responsibility and you and yourself having to do the tasks at hand.</p>	<p><i>The common room space and being able to wear their own clothes emphasises the change between year 11 and year 12.</i></p> <p><i>These physical changes in the environment and their person reflect the increasing autonomy and responsibility in the sixth form.</i></p>

Table 3.2: Transcript of James's April 2014 interview with exploratory comments

3.7.4 Step four

At this stage, I re-read the transcripts along with the identified units of meaning and began to group them into emerging themes. It was at this point that I began to identify where interpretations of the narrative might begin to illuminate the experience of the student. These preliminary interpretations included noting the specific language used; the potential theoretical links; and where the student made contradictions, repetitions or emphases. By identifying potential themes, I was able to begin to capture the sense of the narrative and also apply relevant theoretical terminology. The whole transcript was treated this way and at this

stage, no section of the transcript was ignored, and themes were generated for the whole narrative. Table 3.3 shows how this was done for Emily and the emerging theme of increased workload in her experience of transition into the sixth form.

Increased workload
<p>Year 11 was inadequate preparation for the workload in year 12.</p> <p>Being unable to complete all of the work in the same way as in year 11 was a significant source of anxiety.</p> <p>The loss of control over workload was stressful.</p> <p>Teachers expected learners to be responsible for their learning.</p> <p>Abnormal working patterns to cope with workload were normalised by comparison to peers.</p> <p>Working strategies were ineffective but she was unable to reflect on these in order to develop better practices.</p> <p>Feedback from teachers and falling grades allowed a time for self-reflection.</p> <p>Workload became more manageable as Emily developed new working strategies.</p> <p>Anxiety over workload did continue but this was tempered by more realistic working practices.</p>
Summary of the cluster of meanings that characterise this content
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The increase in workload was significant. • The associated loss of control was a source of anxiety. • Emily was unprepared for the increased workload and did not have the appropriate learning strategies or self-reflective skills to cope. • Teacher support was a significant factor in helping Emily to develop new ways of working in order to cope with the increased workload.

Table 3.3 Summary of meanings from the emerging theme of increased workload for Emily

3.7.5 Step five

Once both the transcripts for each student had been coded and themes identified, the themes were then clustered into groups that were connected. As part of this process, I found it particularly useful to use diagrams to help me visualise the super-ordinate themes and the way they linked with one another. Each theme was drawn within a shape on the page with quotes to support it. From here I was able to move the themes around to show where relationships existed between them. For example how one theme influenced another, or where themes gained or lost prominence at different stages in a student's experience of transition. This was extremely helpful when trying to develop an analytical narrative for each student, as these diagrams provided a framework from which I could discuss their experiences' in a logical way. They also provided invaluable when working with colleagues as part of the checking process. Each of the colleagues who worked with me at this stage was given a copy of both transcripts for the students they were considering as well as a summary of the super-ordinate themes I had established for each learner (see appendix 9.3). As well as this, I also provided preliminary sketches of my diagrams showing how I thought the themes were operating together. These materials, and particularly the diagrams helped to inform our discussions and articulate each student narrative.

These grouped themes became super-ordinate themes. This stage involved the application of relevant theory to help to develop and understand the connections between the themes. At all times during this process, the original transcripts remained central and I constantly checked back to ensure that the themes I identified were supported by what was said by each student. It should be noted that these super-ordinate themes do not represent a factual summary of the experience of transition for that student; rather these themes represent my analysis of their experience of transition. By keeping the original transcript at the forefront of the analysis and ensuring that the theme labels clearly indicate the content of each theme and the meaning attached to this, the participant voice remains central. Table 3.4 below shows how this was demonstrated based on Ben's account of his transition into the sixth form.

Themes	Interview date
Clear proximal goals Now I know what I want to do career wise. It's making me pick the better choices. Wanting to get the success I want and what I need to get further ahead.	04/2014 04/2014 04/2014
Opportunities to self-regulate learning What do we want to do? What do we want to come out of this? It gets us set into the wider world ready for having to get our own things ourselves. I've got more chance to set out things that benefit me.	11/2013 04/2014 04/2014
Teachers expect students to take control of their learning You don't rely on the teachers as much. It's not just the teachers telling us what to do now. We're treated more adult.	04/2014 04/2014 11/2013
Increased motivation I'm happier to be here. It's my freedom now I'm in sixth form. It's given me more of a prompt to go and do things myself.	04/2014 04/2014 04/2014
Improved self-efficacy We've got to think right, what do we want to do? Support inside of school with teachers. I've been able to sort myself out more.	11/2013 11/2013 04/2014

Table 3.4: Super-ordinate themes and themes from Ben's experience of transition

3.7.6 Step six

Once every interview had been analysed and relevant themes identified, I then began to work across cases to see if particular themes resonated with more than one student or were particular (Larkin & Thompson, 2011; Smith, *et al.*, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2003). A final set of themes was then established for the whole cohort and it was from these themes that I developed my recommendations for practice. It was only at this point did I use the information from the snapshot data. The final themes were not selected purely on how often they appeared in the data, but because of either the richness of the data behind the theme or its usefulness in helping me to understand student experience in the sixth form (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The snapshot data was extremely useful when deciding on these final themes as although they were not used in any way to choose or generate the final themes, they

demonstrated if they were likely to resonate with a wider number of students. How a single theme might be identified across cases is shown in Table 6.1.

3.8 Snapshot data analysis

The analysis of the snapshot data occurred after the completion of all of the analyses of the interview data. As such, before I began to look at the snapshot material, I had already established the super-ordinate themes for the interview data. This was to ensure that the snapshot data in no way influenced the development of the analysis of the interview data which has absolute primacy in this work. By analysing the snapshot data at this point, I was simply interested to see if any of the themes already established resonated at all with this wider group of students.

The first step in analysing the snapshots was simply to type up the cards so that they were all stored together in one place. As for the interview transcriptions, this was done verbatim, including mis-spellings, phrasing and emphases used by the students. Having done this I was able to re-read all of the data and make notes of anything that interested me or stood out. I recorded these and any pre-conceptions I had to help bracket off these before I began the next steps in the analysis.

First, each card was read line-by-line and units of meaning were established. These were then grouped into emerging themes. Unlike the interview data where emerging themes were developed for each individual participant, as the snapshot data was much thinner, this was not possible and instead units of meaning from individuals were grouped straight into emerging themes across the whole cohort. Finally, all of the themes that had been identified were clustered into six super-ordinate themes (see section 5.11). From this point I was able to see if any of the super-ordinate themes from the snapshot data resonated with those from the interviews. Where this was the case has been identified in Table 6.1.

3.9 Data presentation

Data will be presented in a number of ways in order to share the narratives of the students and the themes developed from these.

The first data presented will be a vignette for each student that draws together the key elements of their two interviews. These vignettes will be largely in the student's own words, with descriptive passages linking them. The reason for creating these vignettes was to provide a context for the analysis of each students' account of transition. Each vignette brings together their narrative of the transition as provided in the two separate interviews. This allowed a broad sense of the experience of transition as a whole to be shared and therefore an understanding of their lived experience before any interpretation was developed (Smith, *et al.*, 2009). The snapshot data was presented *verbatim* for each data collection point. The emerging themes for each student will be discussed in detail with a summary diagram to demonstrate the relationships between the themes and how they relate to one another. The final cross-case analysis will be summarised using tables to show how themes and relevant sub-themes are represented by each of the participants. It is the vignettes and table of snapshot data that follow in the next chapter.

4. Participant data

The data presented in this chapter represents the information collected from the individual student interviews and the snap shots collected from the whole form classes. For the individual interviews and the whole class data, both the timing of the data collection and the prompt questions were the same.

For each student who took part in the individual interviews, I have created a summary of the points they raised. At this stage, no analytical lens was applied and what is represented is largely the students' own words. By drawing together the student accounts into a single vignette I was able to get a much deeper understanding of their experience of transition as a whole. Prior to this, the accounts were split between the two interview transcripts. The act of creating these single accounts helped me to draw together their narratives to see where the key elements of transition lay for each of them. The vignettes also provided an additional point at which I could be reflexive in my approach. Along with the process of transcription, this created a point at which I could note down interesting or key elements to help me bracket these away in the later stages of analysis.

The student accounts are arranged alphabetically for presentation. For the student snapshot data, I have included some examples of the statements recorded by the students. It was not possible in this case to produce detailed summaries due to the nature of the data collected.

Graphs to show how long students felt transition into the sixth form lasted have been produced from both the interview data and the snapshots. On these graphs, key dates such as term lengths and events of significance are identified. As the data was collected from two different year groups and their holidays fell at slightly different times, intermediate dates and term lengths have been used to allow comparison.

4.1 Student vignettes

What follows are the vignettes for each of the individual students who participated in the study.

4.1.1 Anna's experience of transition

Anna felt that the main challenge for her was the management of workload and adjusting to the different expectations of her teachers.

... it's quite hard at the start, erm, cos there was like double the work you had to do because of independent study right from the start instead of just before the exams, or a couple of months before the exams. Plus, I get like three pieces of homework a day, and I used to probably get like one I think. Erm, yeah, so it's just getting used to doing all the work at home and they, and like teachers try to tell you to fit in a social life as well but then kind of like contradicting it by giving you so much homework. [Nov, 2013]

... it's the management mainly, because it's just erm, like going over notes at home, erm, and doing the homework as well. Like you never know if the homework that you are given is enough to erm count for independent study or if you've gotta like do the notes as well. [Nov, 2013]

[talking about how she is trying to manage the workload] *... I haven't really started to manage it yet [laughs]. Like, I've said to myself that I'm gonna erm, go over my notes, highlight them, when I get back after doing the homework and stuff. It's just quite hard to fit it all in, because once you're home, you want to kind of settle down after the whole day at school and then you go upstairs, do the work you need to do, then it's tea time, then you've got to have a shower and then there's stuff on telly you want to watch so it's quite hard to fit it all in. [Nov, 2013]*

Managing the workload was a big change for Anna. In year 11, she was good at completing the small amounts of work she needed to do straight after school and she did not start revision for GCSE until a few months before the examination. She found that in the sixth form she needed to adopt a different approach.

...like I was good at going home and sitting down and revising for my exams, but I didn't start revising at the start of the year like we have to do with A Levels. Erm so that's something you kind of have to, and because you don't have free periods in year 11, so you kind of have to learn to use that time effectively. [Apr, 2014]

Anna was also finding some subjects more of a challenge than others. In particular, she was finding not only the volume of work for biology difficult, but also the wording of the examinations.

... I think it's just the information. Like there is so much information in biology that you have to know for the exam. There is a massive, massive textbook that you have to know all of it for the exam. Whereas maths is more logical and it kinda just kind of sits in my mind better. But with biology I have to keep going over it and going over it.

[Nov, 2013]

... it's like the wording of the questions, cos we get given exam questions every now and then and most of the time the stuff that I get wrong is the wording of the questions, whereas maths is just a straight answer, like it's either right or wrong. [Nov, 2013]

As well as adapting to the level of academic challenge, Anna felt that there was increased pressure in the sixth form when compared to GCSE.

... there is so much pressure for these exams because it is these exams that are going to determine the rest of your life and there is so much pressure just for these few exams at the end of the year. [Apr, 2014]

[when asked why there is more pressure now than at GCSE] *I don't know why there is more pressure, it's just I suppose it's because with GCSEs half of them I am never going to use again, so ... and the few that I did use for this year, like I was good at and like I revised for them and stuff, it just wasn't as much pressure because, you know, you can always retake them I guess.* [Apr, 2014]

Anna thought that teacher expectations of her and other students had changed in the sixth form. She felt there was greater emphasis on independent work and being increasingly self-sufficient.

I think the teachers expect a lot more of you, they expect you to be a lot more grown up straight away, which I don't think is very fair, because you need that time to settle in and realise that you're in that kind of position yourself, like they just can't expect you

to like be an adult all of a sudden when you've spent so long in the lower years, like being a kid I guess. [Apr, 2014]

in [year 11] lessons I think you get more er, handouts, like sheets whereas in year 12 you have to make your own notes, you have to go out and buy notebooks and bring them in and write down your own notes. And that depends on you and how well you want to do. Like if you don't make sufficient notes, then you can't go over them and review them later on. [Apr, 2014]

[talking about teachers] they rely on you a lot more to do independent study, like if you don't understand something you go over it at home, or you go and find a teacher. They don't kind of re-go over stuff. [Nov, 2013]

This increased independence was also reflected in things like the change from wearing a uniform to being able to wear her own clothes.

[talking about not having to wear a uniform] ... it's just, hhhm, it's just like not being classified just as a school girl, do you know? I don't know how to explain it. It just makes you feel more grown up. [Nov, 2013]

Anna also discussed the change in the number of subjects she was taking. She had made strategic subject choices to help her to reach her goal of studying medicine. She therefore picked subjects she was good at, but had also sacrificed subjects she enjoyed as they did not support her aspirations.

... the amount of subjects, like I've chosen to do these subjects, so there's no reason for me not to do the work. Whereas last year some subjects, like RE, I don't find interesting at all so I wouldn't do work for it, like I wouldn't work for the grade. I mean I worked a lot, well not a lot, I worked a bit for it, but not as much as I would have done for subjects that I enjoyed. [Nov, 2013]

... you drop subjects that you like because others are more beneficial to what you want to do later. [Nov, 2013]

So like I took drama in GCSE which I really, really enjoyed but that then is not something that I want to pursue, or, well it is but it's unlikely that that is going to happen so I have gone for something that is more, erm, more likely to happen.

[Nov, 2013]

Anna particularly enjoyed the different opportunities on offer through the sixth form.

[talking about what she has enjoyed the most] ... probably the more opportunities you get, like I'm on the house committee now which is really fun to do, erm, and you have the house challenges every week which are good to organise and then nice to take part in as well, so yeah, just more opportunities. [Nov, 2013]

She felt settling in was a gradual process that took until about Christmas time.

[talking about feeling settled into the sixth form] probably it happened around Christmas when you've got used to, like being at the top of the school, you've got used to wearing your own clothes, used to this new interconnected group of friends and stuff like that, like the fewer lessons, and learning to manage your time at home and in schools the frees and stuff like that. [Apr, 2014]

Anna thought that some of the shock associated with the first few weeks of getting used to the demands of sixth form and the changing expectations on students could have been reduced by asking older students to come and talk to them.

I think the first week or something you [school] should tell us, or like get like other students in the A2s to tell you like you need to do this, you need to go over your notes everyday otherwise you will regret it later. You need to erm, just like have some experience from like first-hand people. [Apr, 2014]

4.1.2 Ben's experience of transition

Ben described his transition into sixth form as initially stressful, but essentially smooth. He felt supported by knowing teachers and students and the continuity that has provided him. He was comfortable asking teachers for support and this helped him to make the transition into the sixth form.

... I think the school's quite good anyway, and the teachers have been able to help me with bits that I've needed to go through. As well as, 'cos there's not been really many changes in people and like that I've been able to see the same people I've been quite comfortable in, it just feels I've been moving class. [Nov, 2013]

Ben compared the move into sixth form to that between middle and upper school. He was able to draw parallels between these moves.

The main similarity is it's a new start, a new change, I'm doing something I've never done before in that respect. Obviously it's the same sort of subjects that I've done before that I've learnt, but it's my freedom now I'm in sixth form. It was my choice to do what I wanted to do, it was my choice like why I wanted to come here. Whereas when I was coming into year 9 it was that I was still doing these set lessons and I'm still doing these set things and hours, whereas now you're doing this but you can do this at the same time. I've got more free periods to do my revision, I've got more chance to set things out that benefit me. [Apr, 2014]

Ben felt that there was increased student responsibility in lessons and a shift in teacher expectations associated with the type of work students were supposed to undertake. Although similar in style, Ben described how lessons had changed with the focus being on student responses developing and becoming more analytical.

... 'cos normally they've [the teacher] got the lesson planned out and that they tell you what to write down and how to set it out and they give you leaflets and things like that. You still get the leaflets and obviously the same structured lessons but it's more you write down notes that you're going to remember. You write down the notes that are going to help you the most and you're the one that has to bring in your books and you

don't rely on the teachers as much, it's more your own doing, which I think is better because it gets us set into the wider world ready for having to get our own things ourselves. [Apr, 2014]

[talking about work in lessons] ... instead of finding a point and explaining it, you have to analyse it properly, instead of going, oh yeah, this is this and this it that. You actually have to say what this is and not just what's there. [Nov, 2013]

The increased expectations on student engagement worried Ben before the transition, but that these expectation shifts were ultimately a positive thing.

...at first, just before I started [the sixth form] I was thinking, oh it's going to be bad, I'm going to do this, I'm going to fail blah, blah, blah. But as I first joined I thought no, hold up I sort of like this new change I get quite used to it and still at the minute I'm happier to be here and I like the transition because it has made me more mature in a way 'cos I've been able to sort myself out and I'm more organised now. [Apr, 2014]

Ben explained that moving into the sixth form had allowed him to mature and gave him the opportunity to take greater responsibility for himself and his learning.

... now it's – this is the book you're going to need, you need to go and buy it. You need a notebook, you need to go and get one. So I think it's given me more of a prompt to go and do things myself, whereas before, whereas other students wouldn't do as well, they would rely on the teacher to tell them what to do and how to do it. Whereas now I can do this or I can do this and it's making me pick the better choices. 'Cos I've got the choice, do I play football, or do I go and revise? Do I wanna do this or do I wanna do that? So I've been picking the more of the, well, more adult choices. [Apr, 2014]

Ben was clear that he was taking these more adult choices because he had a goal and he realised that it was not long before his school career was over and the results of his work would control where he would be able to go after sixth form. For Ben a clear career goal resulted in a significant shift in his attitude towards school and his aims for the sixth form.

... now I know what I want to do career wise I want to stick to it and I want to do it. Knowing that playing football isn't the best choice if I can be revising. ... choosing more sensible choices is the way I've been going for it, just because I know what I want to do. [Apr, 2014]

... obviously I'm still in school and I feel like I'm in an environment where I'm still learning and I'm still a student, which I am. But in a way I still feel that I'm, I don't know how to put this ... [pauses and sighs] that I've just changed as a person and I'm still more trying to go for what I want and not ... because in year 10 and 11 you're all going for good grades and you're all going for the same objective, but now I've changed and after the first few weeks I knew what I wanted to do and so I've been sort of a bit more greedy towards myself for wanting to get the success I want and what I need to get further ahead. [Apr, 2014]

Ben embraced the freedom that the sixth form offered. He took particular enjoyment from having the shared common room space and being able to wear his own clothes. He also experienced the change in status associated with being in the sixth form and the increasingly adult way students were treated.

... I like having a sense of more freedom, instead of being given all of these set rules. Obviously we still have the set rules, but it changes 'cos now we're slightly older we're treated more adult. I think being treated more as an adult I think I prefer it, rather than getting oh, you're in uniform, you're doing this, you're doing that – we sort of get a choice of what we're doing like with our frees and a choice when we come in. So I think it sort of stresses our personality and what we actually are more. [Nov, 2013]

... now we realise we're more adult and it's not just the teachers telling us what to do now it's us trying to make the most of ourselves in a way. 'Cos now we've got to think right, if I want to do this, I've got to do this and this, instead of the teacher going you're doing that, you've got to do this. So there's sort of like, when we do our outside learning, learning outside of the classroom we've got to think right, what do we want to do, what do we want to come out of this, rather than going, oh this is what we're going to do, this is what the outcome has to be. So I think it's more we have the choice of

what we want to do and how you want to put it across to others. I think that's what mainly has switched me on as myself. [Nov, 2013]

Overall Ben felt his transition had been smooth and he was able to rely on a range of support, including that of his family. Key to this was his ability to be organised and manage the demands of his workload.

I think because I'm pretty organised anyway I've been able to sort it [challenges associated with transition] out quite easily. And like as well as support inside of school with teachers and that, I've also had help outside of school. Like my parents helping me with, if I was to go oh, don't know what to do now then they give me that little bit of guidance and it's from an outsiders view point which I think does help in situations like that. [Nov, 2013]

4.1.3 Charlie's experience of transition

Charlie felt that transition into the sixth form was a big change, with increased autonomy and maturity. However, he felt that despite the significant changes, his transition was smooth.

Er, it's been quite significant of how you're kind of treated, how the kind of erm, what you're able to do in your spare time, you, you get spare time given to you to do extra things like er free lessons so you can do your work and extra time. But it's more erm, you're in kind of charge of your work, so you don't get told to do this, it's you're kind of in control and er, yeah, it's been quite smooth transition and um it's been rather good I think. [Nov, 2013]

... before, if you wanted to use a spare room, you wouldn't be able to use it by yourself you would have to have a teacher there, but now you can go and use a free room and erm by yourself and you don't need to be supervised or anything like that. [Apr, 2014]

... it's of kind of you have to do it this way I think in year 11, but there's several ways of doing it that's correct, but it's the way you find it's easiest. [Apr, 2014]

... everything was different, you were given more responsibility to do your own thing, you were kind of put in charge of your own work. Instead of being having teacher push you more you're in charge of pushing yourself in order to do more work. And there was more work that had to be done. [Apr, 2014]

Charlie found the amount of work, rather than the level of academic challenge was the thing he found most different to his experience in year 11.

Just um, like the amount of work given I'd say is a bit more but you are given time to do the extra work, and um, [pause] it is a bit more challenging but you get slowly, gradually put into it so you know kind of what you're kind of expected to do. [Nov, 2013]

So like the erm, well, coursework and stuff like that and having to keep it going at home more often, and um, just keeping on top of things, because you can't kind of fall behind, 'cos then, you erm have to keep catching up and spend more and more hours trying to keep up. [Apr, 2014]

I think having to try and keep up with the work, extra work is, has been a bit of a challenge, but, so I've had to do more at home and stuff like that but I think I'm slowly kind of getting used to it and I will eventually be fully up to date with everything and erm keep up with it. [Nov, 2013]

It was a bit difficult to get used to at the beginning because it was a completely new idea, but I think yeah, slowly I started to get used to it, but yeah it was a bit difficult at the beginning but you do get used to it after a while. [Apr, 2014]

So I've had to kind of change when I do my work, maybe kind of put more hours aside to do it rather than doing other things like going out. I have to put more time aside for work. It's been a bit different and difficult but I'm trying to get a bit more used to it. [Apr, 2014]

He did however also recognise the additional level of challenge; although this was still coupled with comments on the how the amount of work had also been a challenge.

It's kind of the difficulty of the work, it's a lot more intense, kind of, year 11 and the years before there was a lot of work but I wouldn't say it's as difficult as it has been for this year. It's been quite a big jump in difficulty and the amount you have to do. [Apr, 2014]

I'm researching a bit more in depth into the subject or whatever you have been set as a task rather than just having to go over the main idea of it to go to background knowledge and then add some background knowledge in. [Apr, 2014]

Charlie found his classes were different in comparison to year 11. This included smaller class sizes, different peer and teacher relationships and increasing independence.

[talking about class sizes] *I'd say that were a bit smaller than usual, but that's I think a plus point really because you have less people to er, you've got more time the teacher can spend more time on you because there's less people around the classroom and they can get to everybody. So it just means you can kind of get more help if you need it. [Nov, 2013]*

[talking about the differences between lessons in year 11 and the sixth form] *I think it's quite similar in the way it's done, but, there are a few subtle changes in how things are done in the lessons... so I think, it's a bit more um, independent I'd say rather than having to work in groups more often it's a bit more independent so you kind of have to decide, not have to work with others, just have to work by yourself. [Nov, 2013]*

It's kind of the structure of the lessons in that sometimes before I've let's say you, there's been a teacher not in and you'd get a supply teacher to come in and take over, and now sometimes you get just set work rather than having a teacher there and you are left to your own devices. So you kind of have to control what you do if there is no teacher. [Apr, 2014]

I'd say that they're more kind of relaxed and you can do work easier and that year 11 there was more disruption in lessons because there are more people in large classes. In sixth form, there are less people and less disruption and lessons move more smoothly than before. [Apr, 2014]

... there was more independent stuff whereas in year 11 you might get a sheet and get taught through from the front of the class and now it's more independent in that you get set a piece of work, you get a rough knowledge from the teacher but then you have to research it yourself. [Apr, 2014]

I think the kind of style we are doing work now has changed how you have got to think about how you look at information and how you take it in, so yeah, it's kind of changed the mind-set of how you think and how to take in information and how you do tasks. [Apr, 2014]

Charlie described the way that the sixth form felt like more of a community in comparison to year 11. He enjoyed the fact that as a student in the sixth form he had more influence about what happened and how they got involved.

[talking about something he has enjoyed the most about the sixth form] Kind of the way it works, you get to work with everybody and it's well organised, you get to work together and it's a lot more kind of you're working as a team compared to the years below. [Nov, 2013]

They've just kind of, they're more there's more things you do, like in year 11 you can, I don't know, they didn't really organise, kind of events as much, you do get the events, but they're bit kind of over a wider range of people and this it's a bit, a bit kind of more personal because it's less people so you er, you have to kind of join in. You have to work together, yeah. [Nov, 2013]

... you kind of have more say in what you think should happen, in like the sixth form and school and how it should be run and if you want to take any part in like competitions, stuff like that. [Nov, 2013]

I think the kind of idea of feeling fitted in I kind of felt at the start of this year, so when we came back from the holidays. I kind of felt we had had the start of the year and had got used to it and now that this year I'm really part of the sixth form. [Apr, 2014]

4.1.4 Claire's experience of transition

Claire identified the first element of transition as having the opportunity to pick her A Level subjects. Without a specific goal for after the sixth form, she found it hard to make up her mind.

Well, I suppose to start with, you had to pick your options, which was quite difficult because you go from doing a wide range of things to having to really narrow it down, and like having to think a lot further to the future than you ever have done before, which is a bit scary. [Jan, 2015]

Well I was like, my family and stuff started asking me what I was thinking about doing in the future, like after sixth form and it was a bit daunting because you've never really had to think about it before. And it's hard like making up your mind. [Jan, 2015]

I just don't really have a clue what I want to do, even now like. [Jan, 2015]

Once she had entered the sixth form Claire enjoyed the more adult way of being treated but found the increased workload a challenge to deal with.

And then coming into sixth form it was nice like having the freedom you get and being treated more grown up, but the workload is so much more intense than GCSE and I don't think I really anticipated how hard it would be. [Jan, 2015]

I still think coming up it was a bit of a shock. The workload and the expectations from year 11. But you get used to it and you take it on yourself. It's not just the teachers that expect you to do that much work, you realise you need to do that much work to get the grades that you need. [Jul, 2015]

Well like, going from doing like two hours of HMWK a week to like an hour and a half every night, like at least, it was a bit of a shock to the system. Obviously, everyone told you it was harder work, but I don't think you really realise until you're sort of in that position. [Jul, 2015]

I think with GCSE you had like two years working towards exams, but it's all like crammed into a much shorter space of time with an increased workload, that's been the hardest thing to get used to. [Jan, 2015]

... probably getting used to doing the workload, adapting, whereas you don't have as much free time and it's adapting to that because most people in sixth form start to get jobs as well, so it's sort of juggling everything. [Jan, 2015]

[talking about the workload] Yeah I do think it is quite a constant thing just because it is such, so different to last year. And I do think you grow up a lot and realise that you actually need to take responsibility and get the work done. [Jul, 2015]

Dealing with the additional workload was challenging for Claire. She had to develop new strategies and had to work hard at times to keep herself motivated. She was concerned that maintaining her motivation was difficult because she had no specific goal. In lieu of this, she viewed success in her subjects as a way of keeping her options open and giving herself the widest choice she could.

Well, I just sort of used to come in from school and get it done and out of the way. I think it's just having the motivation to do it and get good grades I suppose. But again, I think having the motivation to do it is easier when you know what you want to do, 'cos you know what you are working towards. [Jan, 2015]

Erm, I think I'm motivated to do well just so I have a wide range of options. I want to go to uni, I'm just not sure what I want to do.

Yeah, I think that's what's like motivating me. I think that's sometimes how people cope with the workload, knowing that you sort of get to go off and do what you want at the end of it. [Jan, 2015]

I didn't have any motivation after exams but going to uni open days recently has helped with that, knowing that you are competing with everyone to get the spaces you want. [Jul, 2015]

I've just sort of realised if you don't use your time effectively you just end up wasting time you could have spent doing things and then you're staying up late trying to get things done at home, it has a knock on effect so when you have the time, so rather than just leaving it to the last minute. I think this is quite similar, but like get your bag ready the night before and make sure you have your HMWK in on time because it's just less hassle, it's stressful enough as it is, without being able to manage your time and be organised, it just makes the experience less stressful. [Jul, 2015]

Claire felt that she had been supported to meet the demanding nature of the sixth form by the changing relationships she experienced with her teachers.

Erm, I think in the sixth form you have a lot more contact with teachers, you can go and see them more or email them more. It feels more comfortable like talking to teachers and asking for help. You have like a closer relationship with them. [Jan, 2015]

I think you need the teacher a little bit more at A Level. Even though it is independent work, at GCSE you could sort of get on and do it yourself, or Google it if you were a bit stuck, but I think sometimes you need that little bit of extra help. [Jan, 2015]

... it really is helpful to talk to teachers about how you are doing or what you can do to improve because it gives you something to aim for. [Jan, 2015]

Claire generally felt that being in the sixth form has meant that students are treated in a more adult way.

I think just as a whole you get treated a bit more maturely, which I quite like because I like just getting on and doing my own thing. I think that's the thing I have enjoyed, having our own space in the common room's been nice. [Jan, 2015]

[talking about the sixth form common room] *It's just like a nice privilege to have and there's always a nice environment and you can get work done, but it's also quite relaxed as well, it's not too. There's not too much pressure. [Jan, 2015]*

Claire experienced quite a lot of pressure in the run up to the mock exams in the sixth form. This was something quite different to what she experienced with mock exams in year 11.

I mean what's difficult is revising for mocks and teachers are still giving us HMWK, so it's just juggling everything I think is the hardest part, yeah. [Jan, 2015]

I think it's because they are so much closer to the real exams, so things you revise for your mock will help you for your real exams. [Jan, 2015]

... and the courses, there's just so much more to cover. So I think starting early sort of helps you in the long run for your real exams. [Jan, 2015]

Yeah, year 11 mocks were sort of more, you'd never really done like serious exams like that before, it was more getting used to how they felt and sort of timing of them and being able to sit still for that long, but I think this year it's more about knowledge and preparation for the exams. [Jan, 2015]

Claire has also enjoyed the increased independence of the sixth form. She also identified a shift in teacher expectation in relation to this. In her view, unlike in year 11, teachers were more willing to allow students to take charge of the amount of work they did. She felt there was greater responsibility as a result meaning that students achieved the grades they wanted if they had worked sufficiently hard.

It is really nice having more independence, and the privileges sixth form get. [Jan, 2015]

...you're not being like spoon fed anymore and you can sort of get on and do what you want. If you work hard you get the grades and people who don't, rather than teachers spending time with them trying to help them, if they don't work hard they don't get the grades and it's their own fault. [Jan, 2015]

I mean sometimes it was a bit scary at first...but you get used to it really quickly and it's a nice thing and do what you want and doing things that work for you. [Jan, 2015]

Well I think that over time, you just get used to it and start working more independently without really realising it and yeah, people in the year above spoke to us and like it's a bit strange at first but you get used to it and it's a good thing. [Jan, 2015]

Well like getting let out a little bit earlier [from classes] so you're not having to push through the corridors and getting lunch a little bit earlier. And having the privilege of being able to go home in some of our frees and get work done. [Jan, 2015]

I think it just creates a nice environment and makes you feel like a bit more grown up, like you feel a bit more special than the rest of the school, you're working harder than them. [Jan, 2015]

Claire described a pleasant change in the social dynamics of being in the sixth form, which she enjoyed.

... it is nice having less people in the year, it feels more friendly because people at the sixth form want to be here, I think there is a much nicer environment. [Jan, 2015]

Well in year 11 people were here because they had to be here. Like so there were people who misbehaved a lot more. [Jan, 2015]

People are more grown up, erm, not completely obviously, because people struggle with subjects and so don't want to be here. Especially now I suppose because we have to stay on until we're 18. But most people have come to sixth form because they have chosen to. It was their choice to. [Jan, 2015]

Claire also felt that there were greater opportunities in the sixth form than in comparison to year 11.

I think you're opened up to a lot more opportunities in the sixth form. Like you've got head students and things, that I personally didn't go for but I know a lot of people have enjoyed having that opportunity. And like subject advocates and opportunities to tutor younger pupils and things like that really. I suppose again it comes back to I mean I

know probably a lot of people do them because they look good on UCAS forms or CVs.
[Jan, 2015]

4.1.5 Emily's experience of transition

Emily described her transition to sixth form as a stressful experience. The main issue for her was the change in the way she had to work. Prior to the sixth form Emily could complete all of her set homework the evening she was given it. In the sixth form, the increased workload meant that this was no longer possible.

You're not used to having so much homework so it can be quite hard to get it all done and in time for the deadlines. [Nov, 2013]

For a long time Emily was working into the early hours of the morning to try and maintain the sort of working practices she had employed in year 11.

I didn't feel that I was working enough, I wasn't putting enough hours in and that I was up until midnight trying to fit it all in and I still wasn't finishing work and had to do it the next day. I felt like I was doing something wrong. [Apr, 2014]

A particular aspect that Emily found challenging was that unlike in year 11, the volume of work in the sixth form meant that she was having to leave work incomplete and prioritise tasks. For her this meant that she did not feel as organised as she once did.

...before I could do it all in one evening and now I had to space it out depending on when it was due in and I wasn't used to having work left over. [Apr, 2014]

A turning point for Emily in dealing with the feelings of unease about workload was the parents' evening held in January. At this point, she was struggling with maintaining the workload she was imposing on herself. The feedback from her teachers caused Emily to reconsider her working strategies and change the areas she was prioritising.

... everyone was saying exactly the same thing – you're capable of getting As and Bs but the only thing, the problem is you are giving yourself too much work, stressing yourself out. And when I said I was working from when I got home to about midnight everyone said you are not going to be able to sustain that. That's what made me think right ... [Apr, 2014]

Subsequent to this evening and some mock grades, which she felt were disappointing Emily radically altered her way of working.

It was just the way that all of the teachers were saying the same thing and it didn't feel like it was a lie and what they were saying was truthful and that I did need to start sorting myself out. So as soon as I got back I was trying to organise it all and I don't know, suddenly it all fitted. [Apr, 2014]

I think it was the first time I listened – I wasn't just thinking no, that's wrong, I'm doing fine and I know what I'm doing and then when everyone was saying the same thing and things had started to slip, like my grades in the mocks, I was thinking right, I can't carry on like this. [Apr, 2014]

Emily's expectations of workload were unrealistic and it took support from teachers and her parents to allow her to address her working practices. Older peers, for example older siblings of friends, set her expectations about workload. It was clear that she also had peers who were attempting to do similar amounts as she was and so created a set of norms that included significant amounts of work outside of school.

I think it was the idea that everyone was saying the same thing and in my own mind I didn't think what I was doing was abnormal – I thought it was quite normal and I had heard lots of stories about people working until 2am every night trying to get all of the work done – so I had in my mind that that's what I have got to do. [Apr, 2014]

Despite struggles with workload, Emily enjoyed becoming increasingly in charge of her own learning. She felt there was greater emphasis on taking control of her own learning. Initially she found this stressful, but eventually found enjoyment from being more independent and learning increasingly on her own without teacher support.

I think it's more the fact that opposed to the teachers feeding you the information you've actually got more of an active role in your workload and what you are doing, you're not just relying on the teacher anymore and you've got to start sorting everything out. [Apr, 2014]

... when you suddenly have to start doing things more yourself it can be stressful. But I think it's nicer because you're not relying on other people and you're kind of doing it yourself and learning things without too much help. [Nov, 2013]

Emily enjoyed the new freedoms of the sixth form, such as the increasingly adult way she was treated and the opportunity to use free periods as she saw fit.

... I like the more freedom. You are treated like you are older and they [the teachers] trust you more I think ... [Nov, 2013]

[talking about free periods] you have to be able to motivate yourself and be able to sort out what you are doing and make sure you are not wasting any time. [Apr, 2014]

...whereas before you've got every lesson with a teacher and even when a teacher isn't here you would have a supply teacher, whereas now you are just expected to get on with the work and sort yourself out. [Apr, 2014]

The more relaxed feel in lessons with fewer distractions, as students who had returned to the sixth form had made a pro-active choice to do so, enhanced this.

... it doesn't feel like the same school, you feel completely different. Not in a detached way, but because you have your own space [the sixth form common room] and you're doing different things. Whereas in year 11 you are all in uniform, you're all doing similar subjects, whereas now you're choosing your own pathways. [Apr, 2014]

... you are choosing your own subjects and I don't know, the people there, most of them actually want to be here and the lessons are less disrupted and I think that is different and I think that's why it feels so different. [Apr, 2014]

Where teaching group sizes were larger, Emily reflected on the fact that these classes felt less focused and there were greater distractions. In those cases, Emily felt she did not know the teacher as well and she did not get as much help as she would have liked. In the larger classes, Emily did not always feel comfortable sharing ideas or opinions, whereas in the smaller teaching groups she was.

[in her biggest class] it feels quite hard, I don't know, you're not getting as much interaction, you're unsure what to do. I don't know I just feel like that's quite similar to year 11 whereas all my other subjects it feels different. [Apr, 2014]

... it's more [the teacher] trying to kind of talk to everyone but it doesn't always happen. You're having to go and find them, like with my coursework, I've been getting it in on time, but they've got to mark it, whereas in a small class it feels more organised. [Apr, 2014]

4.1.6 Harry's experience of transition

When he participated in the interviews, Harry was in year 12 for the second time. He had chosen to repeat the year as he achieved poor examination results the first time round. He selected different subjects and had started year 12 again. Looking back to his first experience of sixth form, Harry reflected on the way he was not prepared for the academic challenge of the subjects he took.

... they [teachers] tell you about how hard maths and physics is, but they don't really tell you how hard maths and physics is. Like, I don't think there is anything you can do to prepare for that and I definitely did not pick up on it after I knew I was dropping my grades. But, I dunno like, it's so much more a lot of work. For maths, even if you think you understand something in the lesson, you have to go over it afterwards. And they like don't tell you how absolutely compulsory that is. I'm not sure I know how they can make that more serious, because I don't think I would have listened to it back then, but they need to find a way I think because they're difficult subjects. [Jan, 2015]

Just, like I got a B in GCSE maths, and that was with a lot of help from a lot of other people. And then when you hit AS, it's like you start at A GCSE stuff and that is the very bottom of what you do. So even from the very start I was outmatched by everyone else in the class and it only got worse from there as the year went on [laughs]. Erm, but then like, it's almost like quite rewarding too because the moment when you do get something, it's amazing and it's really satisfying. And suddenly you're on the same level, but that doesn't last long [laughs]. And so yeah the most challenging thing was definitely the work. [Jan, 2015]*

Harry felt that despite the transition being academically challenging, he drew great support from being with friends and having free periods to complete the work.

I would say honestly like, as a whole it is quite an easy transition. Because, you spend, you see your friends a lot more because you have frees and stuff, and so while it might be quite a jarring transition, you've got people with you who are going through the same thing. So normally people just talk to them about it and its fine. [Jul, 2015]

Because everyone is experiencing the same thing at the same rate and so I don't know, I guess it's like empathy. [Jan, 2015]

Harry noticed a significant change in his relationships with teachers and the way they interacted with students.

Yeah the teachers suddenly become a lot more informal very quickly. And I think that helps learning because you can be more honest with them, and they will be more honest with you. And also teachers are far more willing to give up their time to help you. [Jan, 2015]

Well they know that you are committed to that subject, that you only chose four and one of those four is their subject. So they know you care about it as much if not more than they do. So I think they are more willing to give up their time because they feel it will be well spent in the long run, and it will be helpful. [Jan, 2015]

Harry also described that a big change in the sixth form was the opportunity to wear your own clothes. He felt that this too reflected the increasingly adult way students were treated.

Cos when you are young nobody cares what you are wearing, you are just a person, but as you get older and older and older and also in the sixth form the band system has gone so you see everyone in your year. Like I had been in the same year group with the same people for three years and I had never seen some of them before, just because I was in a different band. So they were always in the opposite end of the school and you have got a lot of first impressions to make as well. And also people judge you by your clothes a lot and they don't judge you in your school uniform because everyone is wearing the same uniform. [Jul, 2015]

Unusually, Harry made the choice to re-sit the year and start year 12 again. He started to think about this approximately half way through the year.

I'd say about half way through year 12 I went through a phase where, for about a month I got my head down and I said I wasn't going to re-sit and that definitely wasn't going to happen to me. And I worked for a month really hard, like I put a lot of effort in and in the end I was no-where closer to anything and so I gave up. I was like this is it, I'm just going to re-sit. So I was definitely thinking about it then and what options I would do, and just getting by in school and I didn't really talk to my parents about it until January of last year. [Jul, 2015]

Harry thought about restarting and made this decision without discussing it with his parents. He felt pressure to match the achievements of his sister.

... my sister has always been one of those people who over achieves. She has done amazingly in everything and I took a lot of challenging subjects I think I guess to prove to myself that I could do as well as she does, and I couldn't and so I think it might part be because of sibling rivalry. [Jan, 2015]

For maths, to help with maths I had an outside tutor and talked about it with her before I talked to anyone else. And she agreed, she said, yeah, that's a good idea 'cos she knew I was struggling with everything else. Although she did recommend I take maths

mechanics again this year, 'cos I might get it now because I've gone over it twice. I didn't though. [Jan, 2015]

The decision to re-sit year 12 part way through the year meant that Harry had quite different experiences to his peers in the second half of year 12.

So what I really noticed was all my other friends were looking at universities and filling out UCAS stuff, were doing extra things, like volunteering to get more UCAS points and build their resume. They were writing CVs and that sort of thing and I just sat back and didn't do any of it and so they were all gone on days and stuff and I was still here [laughs]. And that felt like I wasn't going anywhere and so that like, pushed me out – I'm not a sixth former, I'm just waiting in school. [Jul, 2015]

Because they spent, like I am doing now, they just spent all their time talking about university stuff. It's at that point, at this point erm, it's all you want, I can't wait to go to uni, I'm really looking forward to it. And so I couldn't really share that experience with them I guess. [Jul, 2015]

In his decision to take year 12 again, Harry decided against taking the same subjects. He had reflected that his previous choices were linked to future jobs and potential earning power. The second time, he focused his choices on the subjects he enjoyed.

[talking about the decision not to redo maths] Numbers are really boring to look at. Like, you can make a lot of money but ultimately I would rather be happy and doing something I enjoy than have a big bank balance. And also, if you're, if you do something you love, there are always going to be high-paid positions in that job and so you are just going to have to do well at it and work hard. [Jan, 2015]

[talking about his original A Level choices] I really liked the idea of being an engineer as well, like I thought that was cool, I wanted to build a bridge somewhere and have my name on it. Erm, and the idea of the money you could make from engineering too and the fact that Britain as a country needs engineers right now, so I thought, oh that's for me and I'll just do well at maths, and of course that didn't happen and you can't just do

well in maths for engineering you've got to have some natural talent, and my natural talent is history. [Jan, 2015]

You should chose the A Levels you like and are good at, rather than the ones you want to be good at and you should go from there, because then you will find a degree you like and it will all spiral from there. Cos like I'd say there's nothing worse, because when you start A Levels, you're effectively starting university, you're effectively starting what you are going to study at uni so when you chose those A Levels, you are choosing what you are going to do for the next six years of your life and it is so important you do something you enjoy rather than something you know will make you money 'cos the hope of money in six years' time will not get you through A Level, but being happy will and being happy will help you do well if you are happy. [Jul, 2015]

I know [student] in the year above she takes chemistry just because she knows she will be a good chemist and make an absolute fortune doing it and that's what motivates her. It works for her she is doing amazingly and will make a ton of money in the future, but that won't get me through. [Jul, 2015]

Harry's second experience of transition was socially different. He felt that being distant from his peers at the beginning of his second experience of year 12 was of benefit. He also took great confidence from this time being in subjects he knew he could do well in.

So the start last year I would say was easier because you know what to expect, it's just the subjects are different. I didn't feel as much pressure with the subjects because I know it's a bit arrogant, but I knew I was good at them, I know I could walk in there and I'd be on the same level as everyone else and I could understand what was being said. I work best when I am sitting on my own, either quietly or with my music in. so being kind of isolated at the start, not knowing anyone meant I sat on my own and it meant that I worked quite well. So I got the satisfaction from working well in my lessons, and then especially last year in my frees and break and lunch I could still talk to my friends from last year, the guys I have known for a long time. So the transition was easy because of that and then eventually those people leave as they have done now, but I had a full year to build up new friendships with new people, and so there hasn't been a transition, it's been pretty smooth. [Jan, 2015]

I'd say a lot of sixth form is self-confidence, because you know about half the year drop out and half the year go to sixth form. Erm, and you know that as I did, especially in history that I knew what I was doing. I guess it was weird in English because I hadn't analysed anything in a long time, like even though I had done a year of maths I could still remember dates and stuff in history, but I didn't have the skills of critical thinking – I had lost those in the year and had to rebuild those. [Jan, 2015]

Harry felt that he had been able to deal with his second transition into the sixth form more skilfully. His prior knowledge helped him to do this and to bring the specific skills needed to succeed.

A resilience and a conviction. Like I knew it was going to be difficult and I knew the level of that when I walked in and I sort of watched everyone in this year flounder a bit when they realised the workload. And I have been able to keep on top of it and that has helped. And knowing that this is my last chance, that this is what I am doing now, yeah has made it a lot more serious and I have worked a lot harder. [Jul, 2015]

[talking about the pressure to achieve this year] *Yeah [laughs] it is a good pressure. A lot of my friends in this year joke about how they can do a Harry and re-sit – and I'm like yeah, go ahead and do it. I'm really happy I failed last year. I am genuinely pleased I got to re-sit. [Jul, 2015]*

... a lot of people see re-sitting the year as failing, I would tell people from the very start, well not the very start, but half way through the year that it is an option, and while you shouldn't flunk out and say I'm not going to work for the rest of the year, you should still try, but know in the back of your mind that nothing is forever and you can re-sit it. Make it less of a failure and more of a fall-back plan. [Jul, 2015]

I felt more at home in this year I think. As I have said before in the year above I felt out-matched, but here being on the same, like on the same level as everyone, I feel like, I don't know that personally I have always felt, especially in the year above that the people I was with were somehow older than me and they had something I didn't. It was some innate thing that made them older than I was – I can't really explain it, but now in

the year I am I feel like the same as everyone else, like we're all at the same place.

[Jan, 2015]

4.1.7 James's experience of transition

James felt that transition into the sixth form was a big change. However, he settled in very quickly, citing the transition days in July as the point at which he had completed his transition. Following that, he experienced only a short time in September where he felt he was acclimatising.

As soon as you get into the sixth form it's more of a, you sort of settle down really quickly, be comfortable with new people and it's really easy to be friends with people and you get along well and do your work and it's quite a smooth lifestyle in sixth form.

[Apr, 2014]

[talking about when he felt settled in] *it was definitely a few weeks of coming into the sixth form. It was where I came in, induction days, it was probably the induction days that had the most effect at the start and you come in and you're like ... OK, this is what I'm face with and this is what I've got to do, I need to put my mind to the tasks I need to do and I can't be messing around anymore.* [Apr, 2014]

[talking about when he felt settled in] *that was like two or three weeks into the process of being in the sixth form. It was a big change and it wasn't hard to get to grips with either, sixth form was very welcoming. It's not like, OK, you're in sixth form, do this, do that and I'll let you get on with it, they're like OK, I'm going to help you with these things, I'm going to give you these tasks today, you do them in your own time and when you've done give them back to me on this deadline. It is very welcoming.* [Apr, 2014]

Interestingly, later in the interviews, James did say that adapting to the increased independence was quite a challenge.

It was hard at first; it was a big change it took me quite a while to get used to it. It was a big shock, like whoa, I have all of this work and I have to do this by myself in my own time. It was good for me to tell myself like right you need to crack on now, you need to work. You couldn't be messing around like in the lower years. So it was quite a shock and it was quite hard, but as you get used to it and move on more it gets easier and you get used to it. [Apr, 2014]

James felt that the sixth form was very different to year 11 for a number of reasons. The first of these was the increasing sense of freedom he felt.

... it felt like really different because in year 11 I had a strict form on how to be and teachers helped you a lot more. And now you're in sixth form and it's a lot more independent work and you're more, you have more sense of freedom. [Nov, 2013]

It's like year 11 was, like the teacher was more in, like I'm not saying the teacher is not in control of the lessons but there is more control over the students. But in the sixth form it's like get on with your work, do it and feel good about that. [Nov, 2013]

In sixth form it's really laid back, it's like you can eat in here, just put your rubbish in the bin when you're done. You can talk in here, you can do your work in here, go on your laptop, do whatever, it's like really relaxed and I like that a lot. [Nov, 2013]

Things like the option to do what he chose in free periods and to wear the clothes he wanted enhanced this sense of freedom.

So you can go out and like have frees, do work by yourself and be independent. [Nov, 2013]

... you're given free periods to do what you please and it's your responsibility what to do. So you could do work or you could go out or something. That gives you your choice and that's what you kind of need later in life to have your own responsibilities. [Apr, 2014]

... when you come into the common room and into school in your own clothes you feel like your own person, you feel like today I'm going to do this and do that and I'm not going to mess around, and it's sort of like a very mature sort of sense you get from going into the sixth form. It's very different from how it was. It's really weird you get like a feeling and it's like of maturity and responsibility and you and yourself having to do the tasks at hand. [Apr, 2014]

Well, in year 11 it was like, as you know in year 12 you can wear what you want, you can have like casual clothing. In year 11 you have to wear a uniform. With lessons, it's like a lot different because in sixth form you can interact more with your teacher I find. [Nov, 2013]

James recognised that he struggled in year 11, and his grades at GCSE reflected that. For him, the sixth form marked a change in attitude. With his family's support, he had returned to school so he could get the grades he needed to go to college.

Last year I did, in year 11, my GCSEs weren't that bad as I thought it would, but I had a really bad results day and it kind of changed from there really. I talked to my parents about everything and it kind of changed for me. I started to knuckle down more and feeling good about getting good results. [Nov, 2013]

I think I've moved on quite a lot from how I was in the younger years. Obviously like it's a big change for me 'cos I used not to be the best student. Now I'm sort of [pause] it was kind of like a big hit, like change was like, whoa, I need to do the work like, I can't be messing about now this is my future and stuff like that. [Apr, 2014]

It was kind of a shock to be like your own person and be independent. Whereas in the lower years you would have to rely on your teachers to give you your work and stuff, here you just go out of your way to do it and I think that is a big thing that you need, especially for now and later life. [Apr, 2014]

I quite enjoyed the change to be able to do what I like to do, especially it's helped me to work a lot more because I can concentrate by myself. Whereas in year 11 I had distractions a lot with other students and stuff, but it's a lot better now to be

independent and to do my own work because that helps me as a person and helps me to reflect on my work and do it – succeed. [Apr, 2014]

When you're in the sixth form it's like you're treated as an adult and it's not like school anymore, you're not in your uniform, it's very adult like and that's why I think teachers are more laid back, 'cos you're seen as a mature, high at the top of the school like the very high year and that's sort of like a burden you need to keep and to pass onto the lower years, sort of like show, yeah, you can mess around now but that's not going to help you in the future, you've got to be mature and willing to do things in sixth form. [Apr, 2014]

James felt that there had been a lot of support for him as he moved into the sixth form. In particular, being open to making new friends and already knowing the school.

... what helped me quite a lot is being friends with anyone and being happy to get along with anyone and everyone and I think that really helps you to settle yourself in, to get to know people around you. Like especially if people that have come from different schools to be in this sixth form I suppose it has been quite hard for them because they don't know the environment and people around them. But for me it's been good because I've been here between year 9 to now. It's been very smooth 'cos from year 10 onwards it's been really good, year 9 was really hard to settle in but now I'm in sixth form I know everyone, everyone knows me, it's pleasant, everyone is really nice. [Apr, 2014]

James described how he was supported by being able to have closer relationships with teachers. As a result, he was able to access help more easily and had particularly benefitted from an informal mentoring arrangement.

...you can like talk to them more as a, not as a friend, but more as a like associate more than a teacher. [Nov, 2013]

...the teachers are always there to help you and you can always rely on them to help you 'cos that's what they're there for. [Apr, 2014]

...bonding with the teachers, that helped quite a lot 'cos year 11 was like everyone was the same, I didn't like this teacher or that teacher, everyone is the same now, it's a very mature outlook and it does help you with later life. [Apr, 2014]

The teachers are more relaxed now, they don't have to be more like strict, they're very relaxed and they let you get on with your work. Obviously they give you tasks to do and then you have to do them yourself. Obviously they give you help if you need it, but it's erm, it's very do it yourself now. You need your responsibility to do your own work and that is what I find different in the sixth form. [Apr, 2014]

In year 11 I didn't really have that much support as I did now and it kind of boosted my confidence in lessons and to do my work and stuff. In year 11 I didn't have that, it was just like really, it wasn't strict, but it was like you have to do this and you do this. If you need help, just ask. But it wasn't like help, help. [The head of sixth form] would sit me down and be like how's your day, how's maths been, how's this, how's this?

[Nov, 2013]

4.1.8 Liz's experience of transition

Liz identified the increased workload as the most challenging thing she experienced when moving into the sixth form.

I think the biggest difference is workload, they like give you as much work as possible and then in the second term it kind of lays off a bit. So they've got you into the zone of working hard and keeping up with your work and the, also, there's like you have to write a lot more detail and there is a lot more reading over you have to do, like you can't just go to a lesson and then go to one a week later and like you won't remember what you did last week. And that like has a big difference. [Jan, 2015]

She was also challenged by the increased academic nature of her subjects.

I think the academic one [jump] is harder because it makes you stress a bit, but once you, I think the first time you hear something it's always overwhelming but as you go over it over and again, it's just a period of parrot-fashion learning, you just have to get it in your head. Once you go over it you realise it's not that, well it's hard, but not as much as you thought it was at first. [Jan, 2105]

In PE I've had the big academic jump because we've started to learn how the body works and nerves and stimuluses. In English, it's just terminology we've had to learn to be able to get the marks. [Jan, 2015]

Doing things like reviewing work before her next lesson was a strategy Liz did not apply in year 11. She felt the change in the amount of content in her A Levels meant this is something she now needed to do.

I think because of like probably in the exams they are quite long winded answers and everything links together, so when you are writing your answer it can link to like five different things that you will get marks for and not remembering stuff can cost you a grade because of how close the boundaries are. [Jan, 2015]

When you see how much writing and then you go over, like you give it to your teacher and you get feedback and then you use like a book to answer it and like the difference in the amount of work you've got in front of you is quite big, so you kind of realise how much reading over you should do. [Jan, 2015]

... possibly, from the first couple of weeks it [pressure to review work] wasn't really there, and then they [teachers] started doing tests or just say four weeks in and we went back to the first week, to go over stuff, no one really remembered things because of the amount of depth we went into, it was sort of then that we ourselves realised and teachers started to drill into us that we need to read over all the time. [Jan, 2015]

Despite the increased workload, Liz felt that she could rely on teachers to support her if she needed it, and this was something she had built into her working practices.

I think if I got three bits of HMWK from all three subjects in the day and they were all quite big I'd probably try to do my weaker subject first because then I can go see my teacher – I've got the time to go see my teacher if I need to whereas if I feel more confident and I don't think I'll need to go and see the teacher I can maybe leave it until the next day and work though it like that. [Jan, 2015]

In addition to coping with the increased workload and demand from her lessons, Liz enjoyed becoming increasingly independent.

I feel more independent and more responsible because as I've chosen what I want to do, I'm almost specialising, I feel, not that they're more important than GCSE, 'cos it's your specific subjects that you want to do, there's a slight hint of independence with like it carries on and affects university and the rest of your life that's I think the independence and responsibility side. [Jan, 2015]

I feel like I'm ... at GCSE I felt like I couldn't really work much harder, now at A Level I feel that I am definitely working harder and I feel although there are less subjects because there is so much content I feel a bit more responsible myself to do well because, erm, you're not having loads of teachers all around you trying to get various subjects done, it's all like, it's very focused on what you want to do and because a lot of the teachers say if you don't do your HMWK that's your choice, that's 'cos, it's up to us to pass and stuff like that and again, I think that's independent and I do like that actually because ... although there's pressure to pass, you're not having loads of pressure from your teachers which is definitely something that happens at GCSE. [Jan, 2015]

... because a lot of the teachers are expecting you to just read over and do your work and things like that and say if you don't do it – it's not their A Levels it's yours, but at the same time I think it has a sort of reverse psychology on you because you're expecting them to be angry and they're not, so you're like Oh, and that motivates you a bit at the same time. [Jul, 2015]

Liz's greatest enjoyment was the opportunity to do more of what she wanted.

I've really enjoyed that you get to, you're doing what you want to do so I think it's made me enjoy school more because, like personally at GCSE I wasn't interested in science, so when I was going to those lessons I was like a bit 'ugh', not very motivated, but now at sixth form I find everything interesting and that helps me learn better.

[Jan, 2015]

She also enjoyed the increased freedoms of the sixth form, like the shared common room space and the opportunity to wear her own clothes.

I think that you get in free lessons, you obviously work in your lessons but it's nice to have your own separate area, like we have a common room and it's nice just to separate from the rest of the school. [Jan, 2015]

I think that it's because the independent value, erm, and sort of being an adult, it almost feels like you're in, obviously school is a work place, but it doesn't feel like you're in an office as such but everyone is there to do the same thing and you are all working in your frees, and there is a nice atmosphere in the common room actually because everyone is quite, they're actually quite happy, surprisingly enough, everyone is tired but it's really nice because everyone is in the same position. [Jan, 2015]

... we're allowed to wear our own clothes, which I think does link with being independent. Because it is all about your choice and for some people I think it's important about expressing your personality, whereas at GCSE everyone is quite quiet, they stay within themselves. Whereas at A Level everyone is quite open and not, in a sense they are more mature, and like everything is taken I think a bit more seriously at A Level. [Jan, 2015]

Liz felt that although there was stress surrounding examinations in the sixth form, the experience she gained in year 11 helped to temper this.

I think in year 11 because it is your first time going through the exams I think that is why everyone was more stressed, whereas at A Level everyone has been through it and

so knows what to expect, they know what's coming and they know that they need to work and how to manage their time and stuff. [Jan, 2015]

... when you've gone through it at A Level, you're not relaxed, because it's still very important but there is a sense that it's OK and you don't need to stress out so much, whereas at GCSE your very first exam some people get very nervous, they like doubt themselves a lot, whereas at A Level you know you can make it through. [Jan, 2015]

4.1.9 Nancy's experience of transition

Nancy felt that the move into the sixth form was a significant jump from year 11. This was both in terms of the workload, but also in terms of the expectations of what students should be able to do.

I think it was quite a big leap, like the pressure and all the HMWK is quite different to year 11. Yeah just a lot more detailed HMWK that you have to spend a lot more time on. [Jan, 2015]

I think teachers expect more from you, like especially when you pick up a new subject they expect you to have background knowledge of the subject and stuff, erm so yeah I think you get thrown in at the deep end a bit. [Jan, 2015]

... in like the duration of year 11 you didn't do much work, there's little bits of coursework you have to do but you don't really revise. But erm, you find in sixth form you have to revise earlier to get the knowledge in so you'll be ready for the exams. [Jan, 2015]

I think it's strange because in year 11 everyone's like – oh it'll be so different in sixth form, it'll be so much work and stuff and you can't even imagine what it'll be like. You'll be like it won't be too bad, but then when you get to do it and you've got essays, like 15 markers to do, coursework and all these deadlines, you struggle. [Jan, 2015]

In order to cope with this Nancy developed new working strategies, but felt that she also had more support from teachers.

[talking about how she has coped with the change in workload] *Just go over the notes for the lesson, to have a read of the textbooks and stuff like that, and look on line as well.* [Jan, 2015]

I just end up doing more work, like start earlier and just cut out things that you would normally do like watch TV, just do your HMWK and stuff. [Jan, 2015]

I don't know I just found year 11 a lot easier in terms of the lessons and stuff [long pause] *I don't know you just seem to get more support in sixth form from teachers though I find, 'cos classes seem to be a lot smaller so you get more support.* [Jan, 2015]

... because our class is quite small we tend to get more attention and help and erm, [long pause] *I don't know, you're work seems to be more closely monitored as well, like in geography with folder checks and stuff.* [Jan, 2015]

... it's quite useful because you get more feedback, but then you are expected to do all of the updates as well. There's like all the other work you've got to do and it's quite hard to do this HMWK when you've got mocks to revise for. [Jan, 2015]

It was hard moving from year 11 into the sixth form because of workload and stuff but I think the teachers made it quite achievable. I think although like the homework and stuff was quite heavy at first they sort of, I don't know like made it easy sort of thing. [Jul, 2015]

I think it was really like prioritising your work and stuff. I'd say I do the longest bits of work that need doing first and then like if you've got little bits of work then you can fit them in quite easily, like in your study periods and stuff. So it's not too much work at home but I definitely do the most like, yeah the harder bits at home. [Jul, 2015]

Nancy described that there had been a change in attitude in the sixth form that helped to motivate her to do the work she needed to.

I think it's because we have chosen to be here because we want to do A Levels, but at GCSE people know they can get away with it and it's not ... I don't know people haven't chosen to be in school, but when you are doing A Levels, most people have like a focus of what they want to do in the future and that motivates you to get the grades.

[Jan, 2015]

... if you are at the sixth form, you're obviously here to get good A Levels and stuff, you're not here to mess around so I think you do need that independence, especially if you're want to go to uni and stuff if you have no independence in sixth form then it's going to be like complete change of lifestyle and shock. [Jul, 2015]

Nancy enjoyed the increased independence of the sixth form and had found a difference in the way that teachers interacted with sixth-form students.

It's a lot more independent, you have study periods where you can catch up on. I think teachers treat you like more like an adult. [Jan, 2015]

They [teachers] give you the benefit of the doubt more, like if you haven't done HWMK, it's not just like detention, it's like make sure you get it done because it will benefit you, not like because you haven't done it and you get in trouble.

I like a challenge so I quite enjoyed that, like a lot more independence I feel teachers just sort of treated you more like an adult and trusted you with the work. Whereas like in like the lower years you are closely monitored with everything you do, so yeah.

[Jan, 2015]

4.1.10 Owen's experience of transition

Owen felt that the transition into sixth form had been smooth. He had not experienced large changes to his workload as he was completing Level 2 courses, which are equivalent to GCSE.

I'm doing Level 2s at the moment so it, it's the same sort of workload probably, it's just a little, it's just a little different, I'm not doing Level 3 right now so I don't know what the workload would be like, but I'm coping with it quite well, yeah.

The only real change is the more, more use of the common room, 'cos I have never really been in there so I'm not really like used to it but, yeah I've got used to it now yeah. [Apr, 2014]

Well it's a bit different, in some ways it was pretty good, yeah. I prefer sixth form over year 11, you have a little bit more freedom still.

In truth, I find Level 2 a little bit easier than year 11, purely because there's less subjects to concentrate on so a little bit less work, but the work usually gets done. [Apr, 2014]

He did feel that the sixth form was more relaxed and had more time to work independently. The smaller class sizes also made a difference to Owen, allowing him to focus more.

It's just a little bit more relaxed than year 11, like you can have free time where you can study. [Nov, 2013]

Lessons are a little bit different, they are usually of a smaller size, the classrooms are no longer packed in, so it gives you more room to concentrate. [Apr, 2014]

So probably the teacher has more control over the class because it is smaller. It has less students so it has more time to focus on every student. [Apr, 2014]

Owen was originally planning to come into the sixth form to start A Level courses. Unfortunately, he did not meet the entry requirements for A Levels so had to come into the sixth form to complete further Level 2 qualifications before being allowed to move onto A Levels.

I was all geared up for A Levels after our results – I thought I had got five A-C, but it turned out that I had got less than that. But I thought I did, I did going away from trying to keep it hassle free I did protest and say I have got five as I did get five C's in*

different subjects, but they disagreed because they said they were the same subject areas. Like I would have got two in the same subject area.

I was like, I was a bit shocked that I had like got three instead of five, which is what I got – three. But I did have to accept the fact that's the rules, that's the regulations – I have to stick to it. [Apr, 2014]

I was looking forward to the challenge of doing Level 3, sadly I'm doing Level 2 so that challenge hasn't really come around yet. [Nov, 2013]

I'll have to do the Level 2 regardless but then I think I'll stay on here to do maybe Level 3 and see what happens afterwards. [Nov, 2013]

I would have liked to have done Level 3 because I do like a challenge, but since with Level 2 it being less subjects, you have more time to focus on each one. [Apr, 2014]

Owen found that by doing Level 2 courses both the demands of the workload and the teaching style in lessons were very similar to what he experienced in year 11.

I don't have a problem keeping up with the workload cos I'm used to it. Time management isn't really a problem, there isn't really that much of a problem, cos it's a bit like year 11. [Nov, 2013]

[speaking about the teaching he is experiencing] *Like maybe writing on the board, showing up something on the board that we can put down in our books sort of thing. [Nov, 2013]*

The teaching, like teaching in general is pretty much the same. Oh, like instructions written on the whiteboard that we have to do, usually because after that we just get on with it. [Apr, 2014]

4.2 Data from snapshots

Presented below is a selection of the snap shot data collected with participants from three form groups (see appendix 9.4 for the complete data). The first set of data was collected in October 2013 after the student's transition into the sixth form, followed by a second set in March 2014. Participant numbers varied at the two collection points with 45 students participating in October and 37 in March. In each cohort, there was a mixture of students taking Level 2 (GCSE equivalent) and A Levels. The responses from these two different cohorts have been identified and separated in Table 4.1 and Table 4.2. The students were responding to the same broad prompt questions that were used in the interviews, for example:

- Can you describe what the transition into the sixth form has been like for you?
- Can you tell me about how the sixth form is different to your experience of year 11?
- Can you give me examples of how things are different now?
- What has been the biggest change between year 11 and the sixth form?
- What things have challenged you the most about moving into the sixth form?
- Which things have been the most enjoyable aspects of moving into the sixth form?

4.2.1 Example snapshot data from October 2013

Respondent Number	Level 2 Responses
24	<p>It was difficult to get used to.</p> <p>I haven't got bullied as much as I did in year 11.</p> <p>The work is more challenging and I feel like I fit in.</p> <p>The bullying has finally stopped.</p> <p>Making new friends.</p> <p>Getting more involved with the school and the sixth form.</p>
Respondent Number	Level 3 Responses
4	<p>The transition into the sixth form has been challenging because it is so different compared to year 11. I feel that during the first two weeks of sixth form, the lessons were quite full on and there wasn't time to settle into the sixth form. The positives of being in sixth form is that you can now focus on your desired subjects and there aren't any distractions.</p>
13	<p>The transition into sixth form wasn't as bad as I expected. The difficult part is trying to do A Level work and get a high grade, as the high GCSE grades are low A Level. The work is more challenging and a lot of outside work is required, which was hard to adjust to at first. I do about 5 hours of English outside of school. The biggest change has been study periods and having study time if a teacher isn't in instead of a sub teacher. I really enjoy the different lessons, which I couldn't get in GCSE.</p>
31	<p>The transition up to sixth form has been very rewarding, although hard at times. The jump academically is huge yet all the subject teachers I have, have been very supportive and understanding. The time management and prioritising of homework is also considerably more difficult, but there has been plenty of advice and support. Sixth form requires more personal maturity and studying, and is could be more reassuring to meet briefly with a member of the sixth form staff for specialist advice for everyone: it needn't be long but would be reassuring as a new member of the sixth form. All teachers are very helpful and the form tutors are wonderful, but it may be nice to have a greater one-to-one contact with members of the sixth form team. It's great!</p>

Table 4.1: Examples of snapshot data from October 2013

4.2.2 Example snapshot data from March 2014

Respondent Number	Level 2 Responses
34	Not challenging due to Level 2 and resultants due to significant drop in workflow since GCSE un-motivating. It has also made me feel like Level 3 will be a lot more difficult since Level 2 is easier than GCSE.
Respondent Number	Level 3 Responses
8	It was quite a smooth transition if I am honest. Although the teachers kept drilling into us that it will be more work, and if this was not for you then do not take it. The environment was friendly, the year 13's didn't look down on us, and I personally felt comfortable and determined straight away.
9	Confusing, not given much advice on how to get head start on independent study, <i>e.g.</i> how to make notes, <i>etc.</i> No. Transition was over just before Christmas I think as I knew what I needed to do and how to better my learning to be the best it can be.
12	Scary, couldn't cope with the workload and homework deadlines. No, I feel like I am completely settled and so enjoy sixth form life. Christmas time – I realised the amount of work I was doing was unsustainable and so organised my time much more effectively and accepted that it was impossible to get all of my work done by the end of each day.
13	I feel that my transition into the sixth form was over after the second week of term. The reason I felt it was over, was that I got working into the subjects I had chosen to take and had been in a relaxed environment to help me get used to life in the sixth form really quickly and this made me feel my transition was over. There are no effects of moving into the sixth form that are effecting me.

Table 4.2: Examples of snapshot data from March 2014

4.3 Transition times

In the interviews and therefore as part of the prompts for the snapshot data, all of the students were asked when they felt their transition into the sixth form was over. Where they explicitly answered this, these times have been plotted onto the graphs shown in Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2. To contextualise this information, significant events within the academic year have been shown.

Where no bar is apparent, for example in the case of Harry in Figure 4.1, this is because the student stated they felt that their transition was completed during the transition days in July.

The two days in July involved induction events designed to help students to settle into the sixth form before the taught courses began in September. These induction days included lessons in the subjects they were planning to take as well as social icebreaker-type activities in their houses. The house system divided the sixth form into four coloured houses and throughout the year, the house committee, which was made up of students, organised house competitions.

Having collected a range of data about the student experience of transition into the sixth form, it was now time to begin to interpret and analyse that data. In the next chapter, I will present an analysis of the themes for each student.

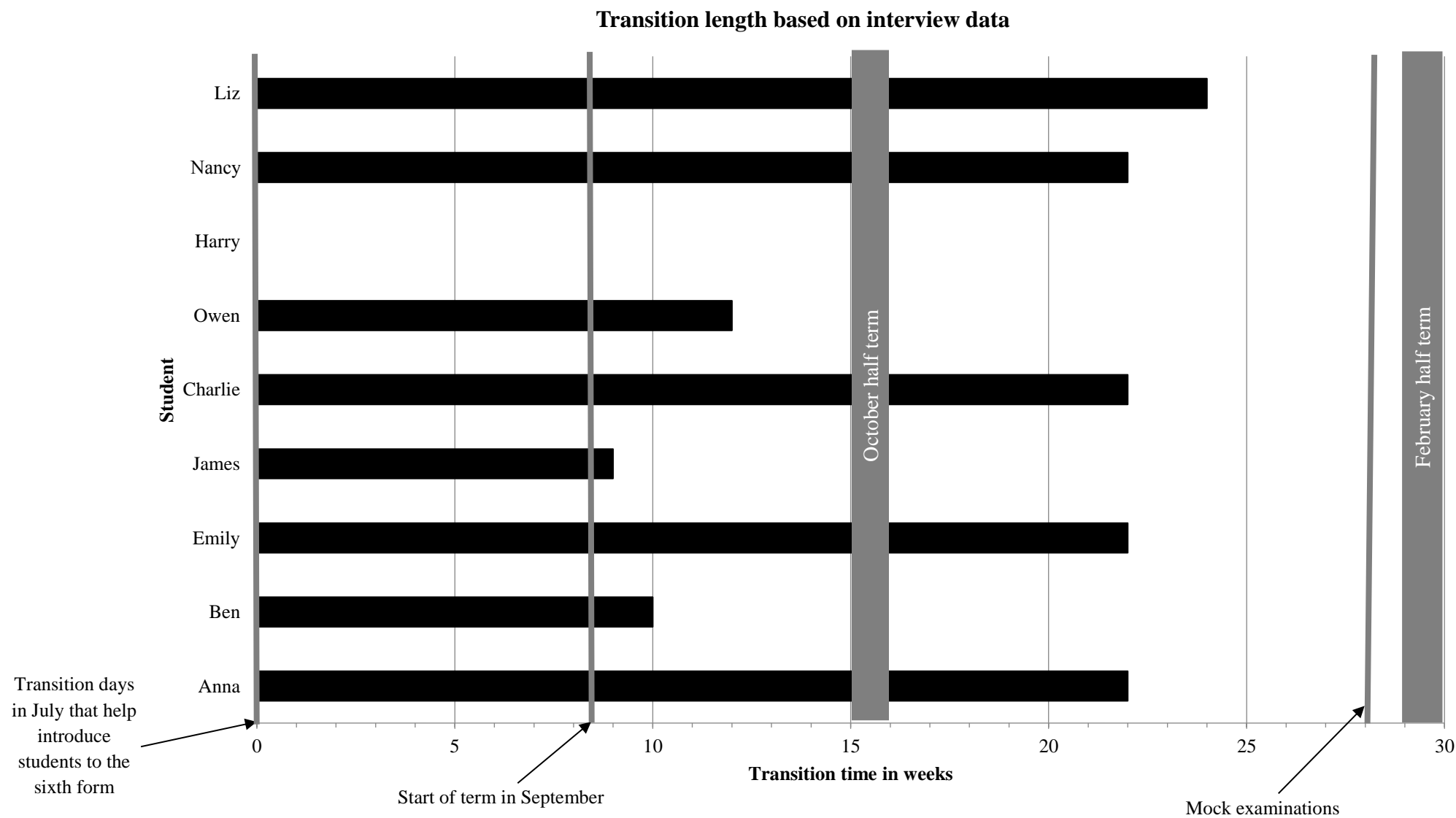


Figure 4.1 Transition length based on interview data.

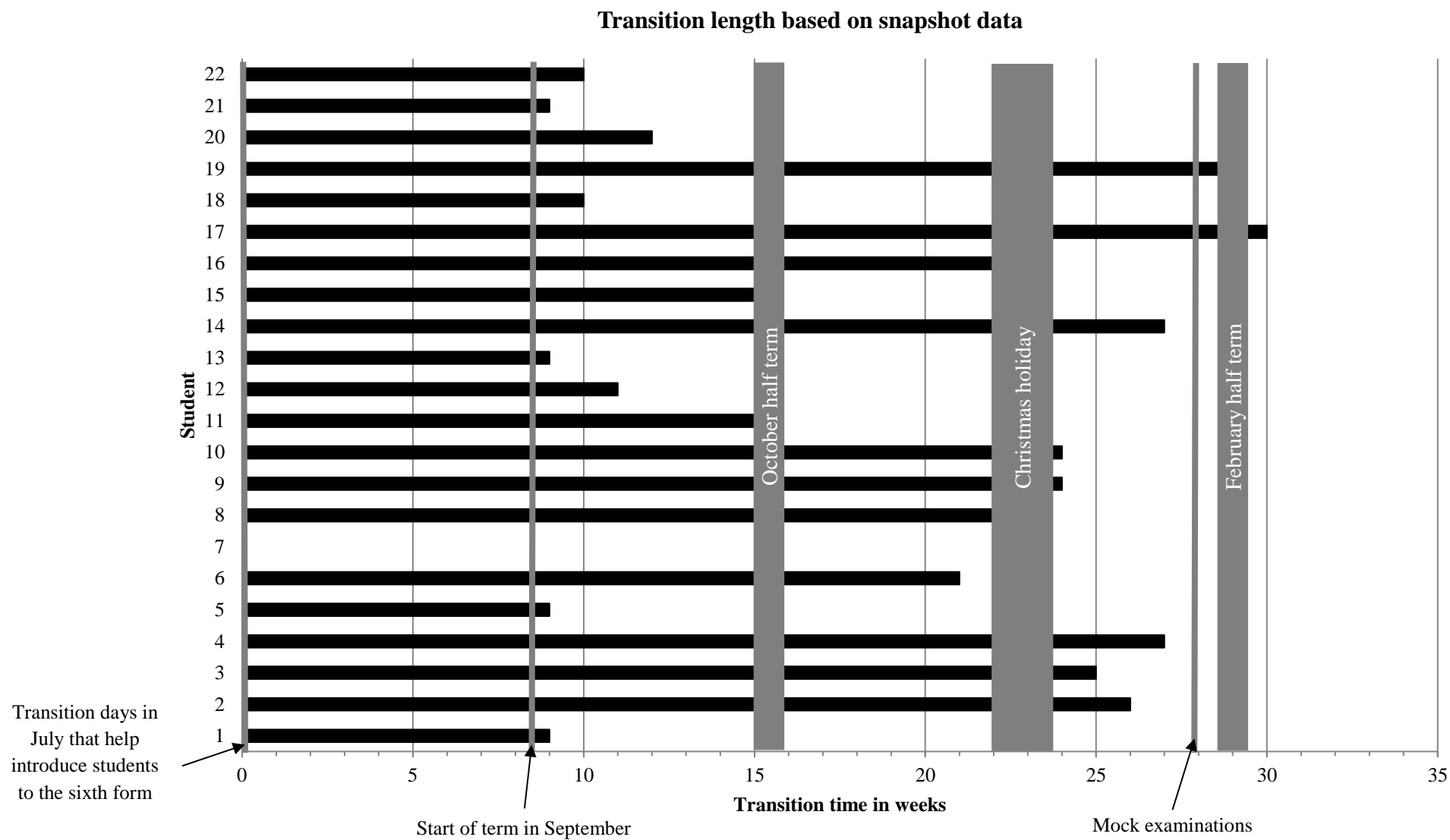


Figure 4.2 Transition length based on snapshot data.

5. Analysis

In this chapter, the analysis of the account from each student is presented. As with the participant data, presented in the previous section, the accounts are organised alphabetically. Each account begins with a diagram that seeks to offer a representation of the main themes for each student and the way they are linked together. Developing the summary diagrams helped to identify the key elements of transition for the students. These pictorial overviews helped me to consider the interplay between the themes. To demonstrate this in the diagrams, arrows have been used to show how elements interacted. The diagrams have also been used to shape the accounts below and have helped me to emphasise different elements of the narratives depending on their importance to the participants.

IPA analyses are usually organised with a close reading of the participant's narrative without reference to the literature, followed by a discussion in which references are made to the literature that might illuminate these particular experiences (Smith *et al.*, 2009). My work follows this pattern, with each of the accounts below summarising the experience of transition for each of the participants. Doing this allowed me to be wholly attentive to the accounts of the students and the elements which made this up. Following this reference to the literature was used to illuminate these narrative elements further. A detailed account of the relevant literature and its relationship to the emerging themes is provided in Chapter 6 where the shared experiences of the students are discussed.

5.1 Anna

Transition for Anna was marked by a significant increase in pressure for her to achieve in her examinations. She had been very successful at GCSE and wanted to apply for a course in medicine at university. As such, for the first time, her qualifications were a clear route to the path she wanted to take outside of school. Anna took until Christmas to feel fully settled into the sixth form as she felt this was a gradual process. It took her time to get used to changing teacher expectations, the increase in workload and additional pressure.

Figure 5.1 outlines the key themes associated with Anna's transition into the sixth form and what follows is a more detailed discussion of each of these.

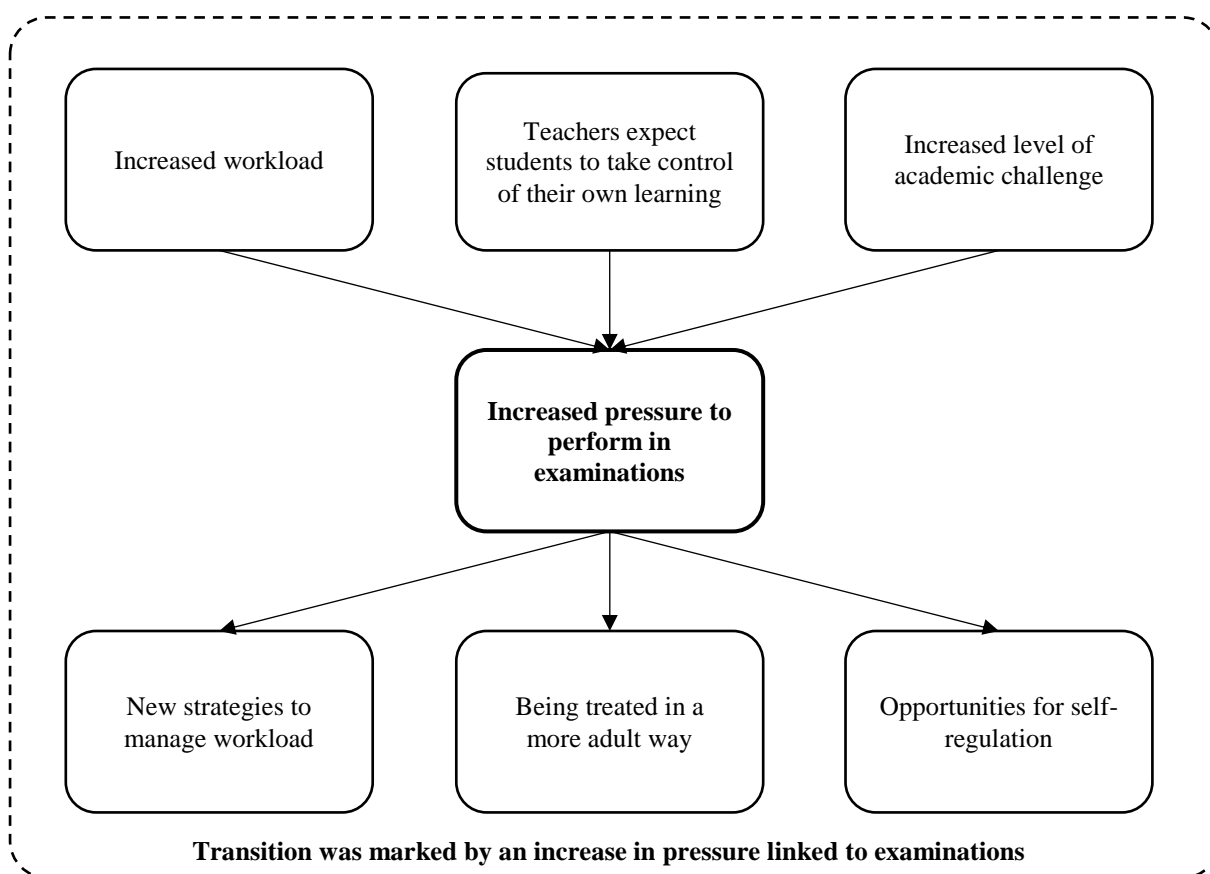


Figure 5.1: Themes associated with transition for Anna

For Anna, the most significant feature of her transition into the sixth form was the increased pressure she experienced. This was compounded by the increase in workload and changes to teacher expectations. Anna was an academically able and focused student who wanted to perform well in order to study medicine at university. The pressure she faced in the sixth form was very different to that which she experienced at GCSE. In year 11, Anna felt that there were subjects she could spend less time focusing on because she had not chosen to study them or they were not useful for her future career plans. Because of this, and the fact she had worked on these qualifications for two years, meant that she felt confident in her abilities and that any pressure to perform had grown incrementally.

I don't know why there is more pressure, it's just I suppose it's because with GCSEs half of them I am never going to use again, so ... and the few that I did use for this

year, like I was good at and like I revised for them and stuff, it just wasn't as much pressure because, you know, you can always retake them I guess. [Apr, 2014]

In addition to this, she was also cognisant of the fact that should things not go well, she could re-sit any exams she wished. Clearly at GCSE level, Anna felt highly self-efficacious and this had led to a position where she was motivated and felt able to cope. Re-sits and the opportunity to develop skills over two years was not the case in the sixth form where students were examined at the end of their first year and have to perform well in order to carry on with their A2 Levels. In addition, the AS Level qualifications gained at the end of year 12 are used in the UCAS application system for university. In a competitive field like medicine, Anna required good AS Levels to support her application. Further to all of this, the sixth form is perhaps the first time students begin to look externally to the school environment. They are now compared with peers from outside of their own school setting and as a result have to be competitive in a very large market. Anna's goals for after school required her to have exemplary A Level grades. She was also following in the footsteps of a very successful sister who also worked very hard, all of which added to the pressure she felt.

... there is so much pressure for these exams because it is these exams that are going to determine the rest of your life and there is so much pressure just for these few exams at the end of the year. [Apr, 2014]

In addition to the pressure she was feeling, Anna was also trying to cope with an increased workload. She had significantly more to do than she did at GCSE and had to develop new ways of dealing with all of this. Anna worked hard in lessons and outside of classes, committing large amounts of time to homework and further revision and review of her notes. It took time for her to develop strategies to deal with this and make sure that she used her time well.

... it's the management mainly, because it's just erm, like going over notes at home, erm, and doing the homework as well. Like you never know if the homework that you are given is enough to erm count for independent study or if you've gotta like do the notes as well. [Nov, 2013]

Initially, Anna did not take the advice teachers were giving about regular reviews of notes and concepts after lessons. Once she had adopted this technique, Anna felt much more successful and able to contribute in a more informed way in her lessons.

I think the teachers did try to drum into us that that is what you should do, it just took me a while to kind of take that advice and actually do that. Once I had done it and gone into the next lesson and they'd asked questions about previous lessons and I knew it! So just that extra bit of revision really helps. [Apr, 2014]

Anna was self-motivated and that drove her to work hard. She regularly used strategies to prevent herself from becoming distracted, for example, using headphones and listening to music, or not sitting with peers she knew that she would be likely to chat to. These actions indicated that Anna was able to self-regulate. Not only was she able to self-evaluate her working strategies and discard those that did not work, but she was also able to select, structure and create learning environments that meant she could work at her best. If Anna did not complete the homework set and then go over her notes she felt anxious and worried that she was not doing enough. She referred to the fact that she was unsure whether by simply doing the homework whether she had done enough, or whether she still needed to do more.

... if I don't do any notes, if I don't go over any notes at home, then I kind of beat myself up about it and I get really anxious that I'm not doing as much as I should be doing. [Nov, 2013]

Like you never know if the homework that you are given is enough to erm count for independent study or if you've gotta like do the notes as well. [Nov, 2013]

In this case, she was demonstrating that she was engaging with and monitoring her own learning methods and strategies. This could explain the anxiety she felt when she did not complete the extra reviews of her notes. Doing these reviews allowed her to compensate for her lack of understanding of 'what was enough'. In effect, she was using a self-regulative strategy to help to increase her personal control over her behaviour and environment, which helped her to feel more efficacious.

Coping with the increased academic rigour of the sixth form also added pressure on Anna. There were some subjects, like biology, where she naturally needed to work harder, when compared to other students, to ensure that she fully grasped all the key concepts. In biology, there was a large body of knowledge, which students had to be able to understand and recall in the examination. Anna struggled and had to work hard to ensure that she fully understood and could remember all of the material.

Like there is so much information in biology that you have to know for the exam. There is a massive, massive textbook that you have to know all of it for the exam. Whereas maths is more logical and it kinda just kind of sits in my mind better. But with biology I have to keep going over it and going over it. [Nov, 2013]

However, her ability to understand that she was less competent in this area of her studies shows that Anna was a self-regulating learner. As well as dealing with the large amount of content in biology, Anna had the added problem that she sometimes misinterpreted the examination questions, which then affected the quality of her answer. This increased the pressure Anna was feeling to perform well in her examinations. This was not the case with all of her subjects, for example in maths, Anna talked about the logical way the information sat in her mind and the straightforward way she could interpret the exam questions. Improved working practices where she reviewed information after lessons supported Anna and helped her to feel more confident in subjects where she felt less self-efficacious.

As well as coping with the additional workload, Anna had also found changing teacher expectations to be a challenge. In lots of ways Anna enjoyed the increasingly adult way she was treated in the sixth form, however, she was very clear that the expected sudden change to a more adult way of working as soon as students entered the sixth form was unfair.

I think the teachers expect a lot more of you, they expect you to be a lot more grown up straight away, which I don't think is very fair, because you need that time to settle in and realise that you're in that kind of position yourself, like they just can't expect you to like be an adult all of a sudden when you've spent so long in the lower years, like being a kid I guess. [Apr, 2014]

She felt there needed to be a clear transition period as students had spent so much of their earlier school careers being led by their teachers. In particular more opportunities to practise the self-regulative skills that have helped her to cope with the transition. She thought listening to advice from older students would be useful. She spoke about the time it took her to develop her strategies to manage her workload to meet the new expectations of her teachers.

I didn't realise how much extra work you had to do, like looking back I would have been better prepared if I had gone over my notes when I got home every day instead of now doing it now. So I think if I could do it again then I would know exactly what to do obviously, but I think everyone would say that you know. [Apr, 2014]

[talking about developing new strategies] ... using my time productively like in lessons and my frees. I had to learn that along the way, to learn that stuff. [Apr, 2014]

Although Anna was experiencing very similar style lessons to those she had at GCSE, there were clear indicators for her that teacher expectations had shifted towards students being responsible for their own learning. For example, she talked about the fact that they were expected to provide their own stationary, make their own notes and decide how much they wanted to record in lessons. The sense was that they needed to make their own decisions about how much they did, rather than being led through every step by their teacher. These shifts increased the pressure on Anna. She knew that she needed to do well and the fact that teachers placed more emphasis on the role of the student to lead their learning meant that Anna had to step into this position of responsibility.

Erm, well, in [year 11] lessons I think you get more er, handouts, like sheets whereas in year 12 you have to make your own notes, you have to go out and buy notebooks and bring them in and write down your own notes. And that depends on you and how well you want to do. Like if you don't make sufficient notes, then you can't go over them and review them later on. [Apr, 2014]

Although there was clearly pressure on Anna, there were also aspects of the transition into the sixth form that she enjoyed. The first of these was the fact that she now had more responsibility and independence. Although this had added pressure, it was also something she

seems to have genuinely enjoyed. The sense of being treated more like an adult was enhanced through things like being able to wear her own clothes and choosing the subjects she wanted to study.

[talking about not wearing uniform] *it's just like not being classified just as a school girl, do you know? I don't know how to explain it. It just makes you feel more grown up.* [Nov, 2013]

She also had the freedom to think strategically about her career path and the way that she coped with the demands of the sixth form. Once she had learnt to deal with the increased workload and the changes to teacher expectation, she appeared to handle the challenges of the sixth form well and clearly felt like she had opportunities to succeed. She knew teacher support was there if she needed it, but she referred to trying to work things out for herself before going to a teacher. She clearly felt equipped to take on these challenges, but sufficiently supported if she began to struggle.

If you don't understand something you go over it at home, or you go and find a teacher. [Nov, 2013]

5.2 Ben

Ben experienced none of the significant social or academic upheaval identified in the literature during his transition into the sixth form. Instead, Ben appeared to have relished the opportunities that were offered to him. Despite some minor initial challenges, he had felt able to cope as he was well supported by both teachers and family.

Ben took comfort from the social continuity he experienced through transition. Clearly knowing the people in his classes and having knowledge of his teachers meant Ben felt confident to actively find support when he needed it. He was also well supported by his parents and he spoke explicitly of being able to ask them for help and advice when he was unsure. The social support Ben felt during transition meant that he had been able to focus his energies on the academic element of his move into sixth form.

I've never really been too worried when I've moved years to all different parts of school so I think it went quite well 'cos obviously I knew a lot of people in my year and classes already I think it went quite smooth. [Apr, 2014]

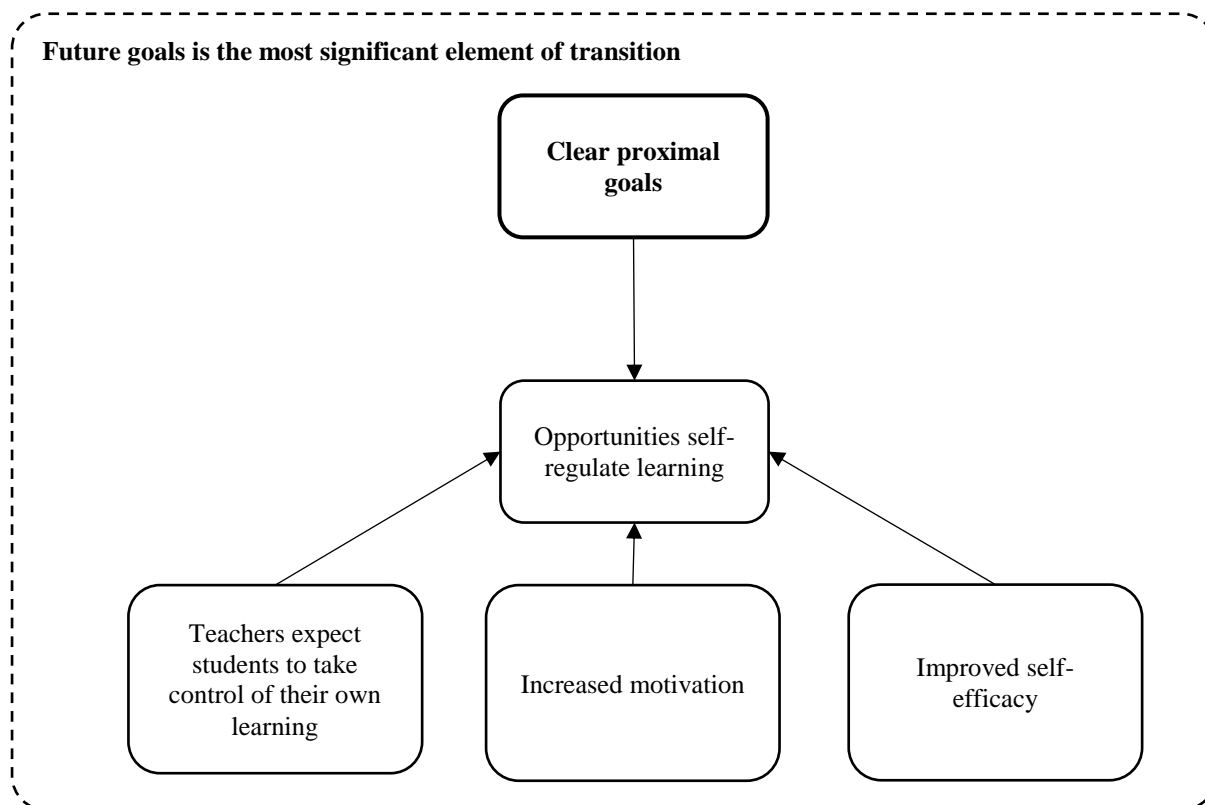


Figure 5.2: Themes associated with transition for Ben

For Ben the most significant feature of his transition into the sixth form was his absolute focus on his goals after leaving school. Ben wanted to become a history teacher and had clearly given this a great deal of thought. He knew that he was going to study a history degree and then follow this with a PGCE. This had an enormous effect on Ben's approach to school. He saw his A Levels as a key to enabling him to move onto what he wanted to do. Because of this motivation, Ben was approaching his learning in a significantly different way.

... now I know what I want to do career wise I want to stick to it and I want to do it. Knowing that playing football isn't the best choice if I can be revising. ... choosing more sensible choices is the way I've been going for it, just because I know what I want to do. [Apr, 2014]

Now that he had a specific goal, Ben was able to focus his efforts and was motivated to demonstrate his competency in this context. Ben clearly felt self-efficacious about his learning. He was able to access the work and tasks set by his teachers and when unsure he felt well supported. Ben had clearly liked being able to choose what he wanted to study and his interest in learning in the sixth form was leading to increased motivation and enjoyment.

Obviously it's the same sort of subjects that I've done before that I've learnt, but it's my freedom now I'm in sixth form. It was my choice to do what I wanted to do, it was my choice like why I wanted to come here. [Apr, 2014]

Ben was motivated by the prospect of attending university and the possibility of achieving his goal of becoming a teacher. It was more than simple motivation towards a specific outcome that Ben was demonstrating. He was also enjoying the autonomy and independence of the sixth form and the opportunity to direct his own learning. These were further examples of the benefits Ben was experiencing because of having clear achievement goals. Such goals often promote task mastery and it would seem that Ben was beginning to working in this way. The nature of the teaching and learning in the sixth form he was experiencing also reinforced the mastery view, as there was less direct support from teachers and more emphasis on mastery rather than performance.

... now we realise we're more adult and it's not just the teachers telling us what to do now it's us trying to make the most of ourselves in a way. 'Cos now we've got to think right, if I want to do this, I've got to do this and this, instead of the teacher going you're doing that, you've got to do this. So there's sort of like, when we do our outside learning, learning outside of the classroom we've got to think right, what do we want to do, what do we want to come out of this, rather than going, oh this is what we're going to do, this is what the outcome has to be. [Nov, 2013]

It would appear that Ben, perhaps for the first time, was beginning to self-regulate. The reasons for this appear to be his well-formed and clear goals, but also the fact that the structural changes to teaching and learning in the sixth form, such as free periods and teacher expectations focused on greater student self-reliance and responsibility all provided clear opportunities for self-regulated learning. Before the sixth form, Ben had very diffuse, broad goals, such as 'get good grades' and at times found motivation hard to maintain. Now, having

decided to become a history teacher and pursue a history degree, and then a PGCE, Ben had a number of very well structured goals he could work towards, which gave his school work greater valence. Because Ben believed that his goal of becoming a teacher was both important and achievable, he was highly motivated.

In order to meet his goal, Ben was willingly accepting more responsibility for his achievement outcomes and viewed his learning as a systematic process over which he had control. For example, Ben actively sought out advice where he needed it from his teachers and thought carefully about his learning environment to ensure that he had the best possible chance to succeed.

... obviously I'm still in school and I feel like I'm in an environment where I'm still learning and I'm still a student, which I am. But in a way I still feel that I'm, I don't know how to put this ... [pauses and sighs] that I've just changed as a person and I'm still more trying to go for what I want and not ... because in year 10 and 11 you're all going for good grades and you're all going for the same objective, but now I've changed and after the first few weeks I knew what I wanted to do and so I've been sort of a bit more greedy towards myself for wanting to get the success I want and what I need to get further ahead. [Apr, 2014]

The biggest change for Ben was the increased sense of student responsibility. This demonstrated itself in a range of ways, for example, the need for students to take their own notes and find their own books, to having to analyse and think about their work in an increasingly more detailed way. Ben clearly felt that teachers had devolved much more responsibility onto students. This was initially a source of concern for Ben and he spoke about being nervous of this increased level of autonomy before joining the sixth form. However, that increased responsibility and freedom was clearly something that Ben enjoyed and this had meant that he felt happier in the sixth form than he did in the lower years as he was in control of his learning. His ability to organise and plan his work supported this. Ben realised that his future successes were in his control. This was a new way of thinking for him and reinforces the view that with increased age, academic self-perception becomes more accurate. Ben realised that effort alone would not guarantee his success and that he had to take responsibility and decide when and how he would take control of his learning. He was willing to sacrifice the enjoyment of playing football with his friends to ensure that he

completed his work. This indicated that Ben was confident in his ability to learn and had sufficient personal resolve to concentrate on his studies. These capabilities are often lacking in younger people and Ben identified this as a change he had experienced as he has got older, but it was also clearly linked to his future goals and optimistic view of his life after the sixth form.

Whereas now I can do this or I can do this and it's making me pick the better choices. 'Cos I've got the choice, do I play football, or do I go and revise? Do I wanna do this or do I wanna do that? So I've been picking the more of the, well, more adult choices.
[Apr, 2014]

The autonomy he had in terms of how he approached his work and the strategies he applied appeared to further enhance Ben's self-regulation. Unlike in the lower year groups where there were few opportunities for self-regulating and independent learning, it would appear that the nature of teaching and learning in the sixth form supported and modelled ways for him to become independent and self-regulating. Because teachers supported autonomy and were clearly involved with student learning, students were more likely to maintain their intrinsic motivation and develop autonomous forms of self-regulation through the process of internalisation and integration.

... 'cos normally they've [the teacher] got the lesson planned out and that they tell you what to write down and how to set it out and they give you leaflets and things like that. You still get the leaflets and obviously the same structured lessons but it's more you write down notes that you're going to remember. You write down the notes that are going to help you the most and you're the one that has to bring in your books and you don't rely on the teachers as much, it's more your own doing, which I think is better because it gets us set into the wider world ready for having to get our own things ourselves. [Apr, 2014]

Ben took comfort from the social continuity he experienced through transition. Knowing the people in his classes and having knowledge of his teachers meant Ben felt confident to actively find support when he needed it. He was also well supported by his parents and he spoke explicitly of being able to ask them for help and advice when he was unsure. The social

support Ben felt during transition meant that he had been able to focus his energies on the academic element of his move into sixth form.

I've never really been too worried when I've moved years to all different parts of school so I think it went quite well 'cos obviously I know a lot of people in my year and classes already I think it went quite smooth. [Apr, 2014]

Figure 5.2 shows that self-regulation has clearly formed a central part of Ben's experience of transition into the sixth form. The opportunities he had to become more independent and the proximal goals he set himself all provided the environment, support and mind-set within which, for the first time, he could begin to be truly self-regulative.

5.3 Charlie

Charlie enjoyed moving into the sixth form and described the transition as smooth. He particularly enjoyed the sense of independence and responsibility that he gained and the feel of the sixth form in comparison to year 11. Despite enjoying taking more control of his learning and feeling more independent, these things contributed to the most challenging aspect of transition into the sixth form for Charlie: coping with the increasing workload and academic rigour. Figure 5.3 shows the elements of the sixth form that Charlie found both enjoyable and challenging. The shaded theme contributed to both challenge and enjoyment for him.

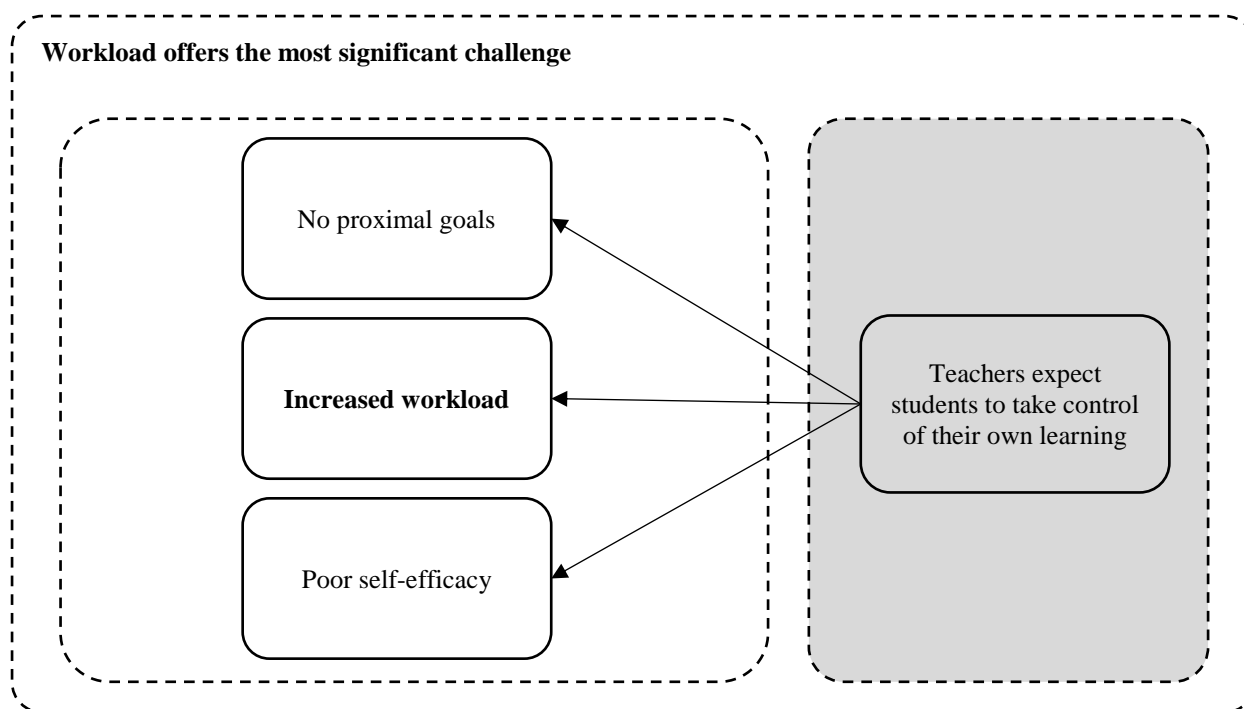


Figure 5.3: Themes associated with transition for Charlie

Charlie felt that the workload he encountered in year 11 did not help him to deal with the significant increase in the sixth form. He had to spend more time outside of school completing work and he was struggling to do this and maintain other commitments. In year 11, Charlie felt deadlines were more flexible and less demanding. He estimated his workload had doubled and was struggling to meet deadlines and the accompanying increase in the level of academic rigour. It was interesting that Charlie only really reacted to issues with workload once multiple pieces of work began to stack up. Despite using his free periods and time after school to do work, he was still falling behind. Although he acknowledged in the interviews several times that he was behind, Charlie was not thinking about tackling the work in a different way. He simply seemed content to work in the same way he had been but juggling the most important deadlines and tasks. He seemed unable to offer new ways of working and simply stated things like

I've just had to kind of spend more time at home, and er, just make sure I get it all done before going out and doing things. [Nov, 2013]

I just gotta keep going at it, keep continuing with the work and erm, meet deadlines to be done. [Nov, 2013]

I hadn't put enough time away to do homework, and I may not have given myself time to do all of the work, and I maybe have got some work to catch up on. [Apr, 2014]

Despite clearly having a good understanding of the sorts of techniques he could use to manage his workload, such as using his planner effectively, mapping out his time in free periods and prioritising work, it would appear that Charlie was unable to effectively put these into practice. As such he had fallen behind in his work and this was something that came up in both interviews, indicating that this was a persistent problem for him. It would appear that his inability to cope with the increased workload undermined Charlie's self-efficacy. Without specific goals for his learning, Charlie was unable to effectively perceive any progress he was making. As such he had few opportunities to enhance his self-efficacy. To compound this issue, the goals Charlie did have were vague – such as 'spend more time' and 'keep going at it' – these sorts of goals do not encourage commitment or persistence and therefore were not likely to improve academic performance or provide opportunities to enhance self-efficacy. It was probable Charlie would continue to remain behind, as he had no particular strategy to change his working patterns. This meant it was likely he would receive negative feedback from teachers, which would further undermine his self-efficacy and potentially introduce doubt about his ability and ultimately reduce his motivation.

What had compounded Charlie's difficulties were the changing teacher expectations and increased student independence and responsibility. Charlie understood that as a sixth-form student he was required to take greater control of his own learning. He talked about the way teachers introduced and explained concepts and then expected students to develop their own lines of research and ways of working. It was interesting that when Charlie talked about this he only referred to simply doing more background research as a way in which he was working differently from year 11. He talked about the way the A Level lessons were taught and how this was making him think differently, but when he was probed further about this, all he could say was that he does more background research into ideas. Charlie had a limited understanding and experience of any sorts of techniques or strategies that he might have been able to use in order to self-direct, self-evaluate and therefore self-regulate his learning.

So instead of kind of looking at the basics I'd look more into the depth of the thing than just look at the overview of the whole subject or the task I would look more in depth into it, and take more knowledge in I would say. [Apr, 2014]

Charlie also discussed the increased independence in the sixth form. This included both the way he was working in lessons, but also the way in which sixth form students were treated outside of class. He worked much more independently in lessons, taking control of tasks such as his business coursework.

Like for example, if, in business I've got to er, not work with other people to complete business I have to do it by myself, kind of choose everything that happens with it.

[Nov, 2013]

This links to teacher expectations that students should be taking greater control of their own learning. It was interesting that Charlie had also experienced less group work in the sixth form when compared to GCSE. In his sixth form classes, the focus clearly seemed to be on the ability of individuals to carry out their own work. Charlie talked about working with peers in his free periods to obtain information and explanation from them regarding concepts he did not understand. Charlie's reliance on peers rather than teachers for support may have reinforced his understanding that teachers expected students to be increasingly self-reliant.

I try to erm, work with others in free periods, 'cos then they can give me, er, other information so if I don't understand some work they might be able to explain it to me, if I have struggled in the lesson. [Nov, 2013]

In this way, teachers may have appeared to Charlie as unapproachable or that by asking for help he was admitting he was unable to work independently. Independent work was causing Charlie problems, as he was unable to keep up with the workload and did not appear to have the ability to manage this or find suitable routes for support.

Despite the challenges, Charlie appeared to have enjoyed moving into the sixth form. He described his transition as smooth and talked about a slow introduction to the workload and having time to get used to this. He enjoyed the opportunity to work in new ways and liked the additional responsibility sixth form students had. He did recognise that at the beginning the move was difficult but that over time he became used to the new ways of working. Charlie thought that by Christmas he felt like he had fully settled into the sixth form. One area that Charlie was pleased with was the smaller class sizes and lack of disruption to lessons. He also

talked about the way teachers were more relaxed and that students were able to take control of their learning.

Er, it's been quite significant of how you're kind of treated, how the kind of erm, what you're able to do in your spare time, you, you get spare time given to you to do extra things like er free lessons so you can do your work and extra time. But its more erm, you're in kind of charge of your work, so you don't get told to do this, it's you're kind of in control. [Nov, 2013]

Given Charlie's recognition of more relaxed relationships with teaching staff and increased teacher time in class, he did not refer to seeking help or support from teachers. In this way, Charlie had lost valuable opportunities for support and guidance. Instead, he focused on the expectation that students take greater responsibility for their learning. Charlie clearly saw this as positive and a reflection of the way sixth form students were treated in a more adult way, but was not sure of which strategies he could use to be effective in this sort of academic setting.

Another source of enjoyment for Charlie was the increased sense of community in the sixth form. He liked the opportunity to engage in the activities arranged for, and by the sixth form students.

There's more things you do, like in year 11 you can, I don't know, they didn't really organise, kind of events as much, you do get the events, but they're bit kind of over a wider range of people and this it's a bit, a bit kind of more personal because it's less people so you er, you have to kind of join in. You have to work together, yeah. [Nov, 2013]

The smaller size of the year group helped Charlie to get to know other students. Further evidence of the more adult way sixth form students were treated is the way in which they had the opportunity to have a say in the running of the sixth form. It is very interesting how both the increased responsibility and changing teacher expectations have both caused sources of enjoyment and challenge for Charlie.

5.4 Claire

For Claire, there have been three key challenges associated with the move into the sixth form (see Figure 5.4). The first of these was the increase in workload, which was in stark contrast to what she had experienced in year 11. The second was a lack of a specific goal for what she wanted to do after the sixth form. This led to some anxiety when comparing herself with peers who had clear goals and ambitions. As well as this, the lack of a specific goal meant she found, at times, motivation was hard to maintain. It was this lack of motivation that was the third key issue for Claire. However, she demonstrated great resilience and ability to adapt. She successfully developed new ways of working, sought out teacher support where needed and developed for herself clear goals linked to her A Levels, without the need for a specific plan after the sixth form.

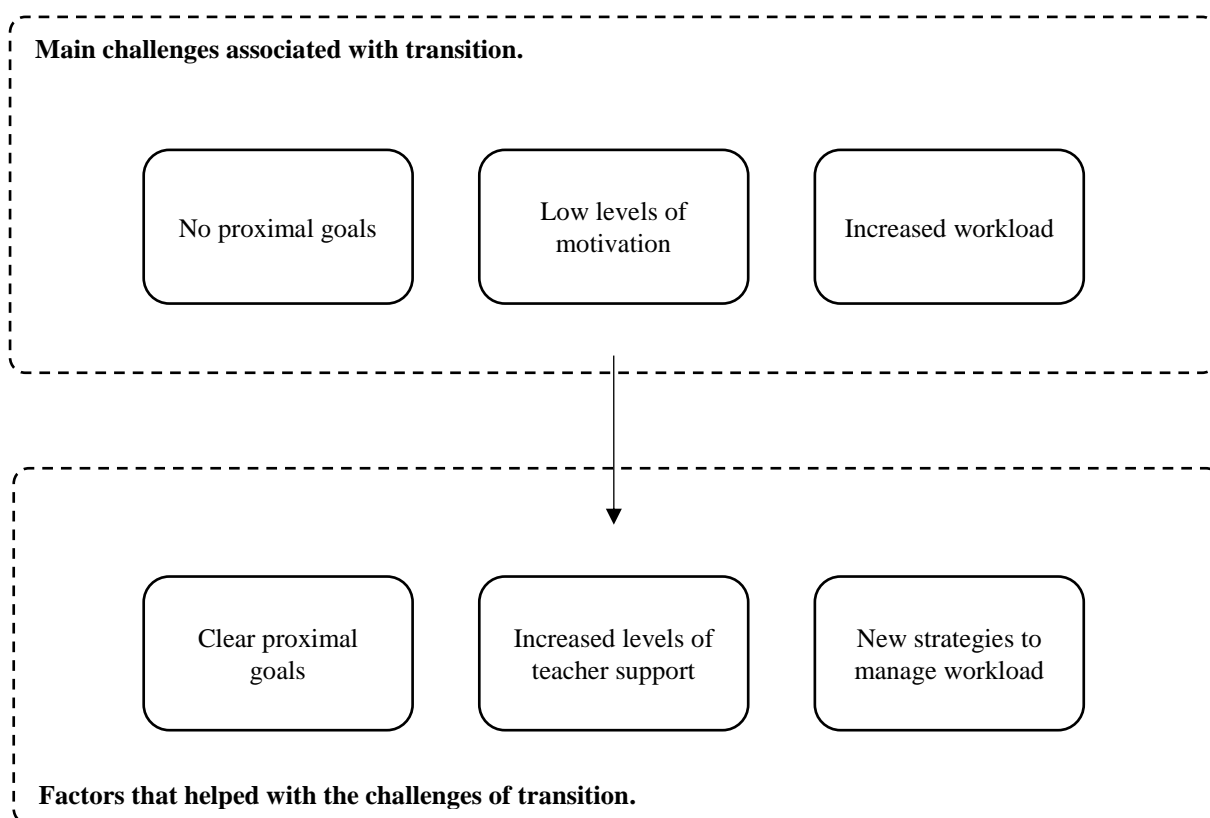


Figure 5.4: Themes associated with transition for Claire

The biggest issue Claire seems to have faced was the lack of any specific goals for what she wanted to do after school. This caused problems even before entering the sixth form, as she had no particular focus for her course choices. As a student who did well across a range of subjects she clearly found which four subjects to focus on a challenge.

Well, I suppose to start with, you had to pick your options, which was quite difficult because you go from doing a wide range of things to having to really narrow it down, and like having to think a lot further to the future than you ever have done before, which is a bit scary. [Jan, 2015]

The lack of a specific future goal was a continued problem during her time in the sixth form. Without a specific end-point, it was hard for Claire to set useful proximal goals. As such, she found motivation difficult as she was pursuing the rather general goal of doing the best she could. The lack of goals also led to anxiety about not having plans for after the sixth form when comparing herself to her peers. This was compounded by the challenge associated with the extra workload she experienced as she entered the sixth form.

In the early stages of transition into the sixth form, Claire experienced an increase in workload, which meant that she has had to make careful use of her free time. This was a significant difference between year 11 and the sixth form. It was interesting that although she had predicted an increased workload, the increase had been significantly greater than she imagined.

The workload is so much more intense than GCSE and I don't think I really anticipated how hard it would be. [Jan, 2015]

Without clear proximal goals, when dealing with the increased workload, Claire had few opportunities to assess her own progress, and enhance her feelings of self-efficacy. Despite this she was able to self-reflect and develop new ways of working to cope with the additional demands. First, this meant learning to cope with the increased autonomy students were given. Claire was used to much more teacher direction in year 11, whereas in the sixth form her teachers wanted her to be able to develop her own ways of working. Claire found this challenging at first, but soon developed new working patterns to cope.

I mean sometimes it was a bit scary at first, like, but you get used to it really quickly and it's a nice thing and do what you want and doing things that work for you. [Jan, 2015]

Claire's ability to adapt to, and begin to enjoy, the increased independence of the sixth form was because she felt supported by her teachers. Although she recognised that students were

treated in a more adult way and that they had much more responsibility for their work, she also felt teachers were more willing to give up their time to provide support. Claire was able to reflect on her own learning, and when needed, sought out the teacher guidance she required. By having less direct input from teachers, Claire was clear that academic outcomes were now firmly due to the amount of work put in by students. This was a change from year 11 where it was seen that student attainment was much more the teacher's responsibility. This view was further enhanced by the new social relationships Claire was enjoying. The remaining students she felt were more focused and the whole environment was more conducive to study, reinforcing the concept that students were responsible for their own learning, not their teachers.

I think you need the teacher a little bit more at A Level. [Jan, 2015]

It really is helpful to talk to teachers about how you are doing or what you can do to improve because it gives you something to aim for. [Jan, 2015]

If you work hard you get the grades and people who don't, rather than teachers spending time with them trying to help them, if they don't work hard they don't get the grades and it's their own fault. [Jan, 2015]

Despite no specific goals for university – Claire had felt increased pressure for her mock exams in comparison to year 11. It was likely that due to the increased autonomy, there was more focus on student ability and therefore greater focus on outcomes as a reflection on that, particularly in comparison to peers. It was also likely that since AS Level examinations happen in the summer of year 12, there was a very short time for students to prepare. In addition AS Level results are often used to inform UCAS applications as well as whether students are able to continue to A Levels. Therefore in relation to her peers who were attributing great importance to their AS Level examinations in relation to their university choices, Claire's lack of destination plans placed her at odds with her contemporaries. Many of them had clear destinations in mind and therefore specific levels of achievement that they had to attain unlike Claire. However, to keep going, she used the aim of achieving the best grades she could to ensure that she had the widest range of options open to her. In this way, Claire engineered a situation where she was been able to alleviate her anxiety of not knowing what to choose, by ensuring that when she did decide, she had not limited access to any of her

future choices. Since attending some university open days and identifying some of the opportunities out there, thus being able to further refine her goals, Claire had fewer issues with motivation.

I didn't have any motivation after exams but going to uni open days recently has helped with that, knowing that you are competing with everyone to get the spaces you want.

[Jul, 2015]

I think I'm motivated to do well just so I have a wide range of options. [Jan, 2015]

5.5 Emily

Transition for Emily occurred in two distinct phases. The first of these was characterised by significant anxiety for her around a number of issues. These included changing teacher expectations, an increased workload and finding that her old working practices were not fit-for-purpose. This initial phase lasted until the parents evening in January. Following this, Emily had a significant breakthrough. She was able for the first time to develop new working strategies that allowed her to cope with the demands on her time. As she began to feel more in control from this point, she was also able to begin to appreciate the changing expectations of teachers and recognise how this was going to be useful to her in the future, as she moved away from school. These two phases and their associated themes are shown in Figure 5.5. Each of the two main themes will be dealt with separately, starting with the stressful elements of the transition experience, followed by the factors that allowed Emily to begin to enjoy the experience of the sixth form.

The initial stressful period of transition for Emily lasted some time and it took significant intervention from a number of teachers for her to be able to re-evaluate her position and move forward. The major source of anxiety for Emily was around her academic work, not social relationships with peers, as is common in earlier transition events such as the movement from primary to secondary school. Emily found the move to sixth form a big change. She very quickly realised that she was not able to cope with the amount of work she was being set and the working strategies that she had relied on at GCSE were no longer working.

I personally found it really tough, I struggled to cope with the workload and manage my time effectively so it was a big change, I didn't realise how big until I was actually doing it. [Apr, 2014]

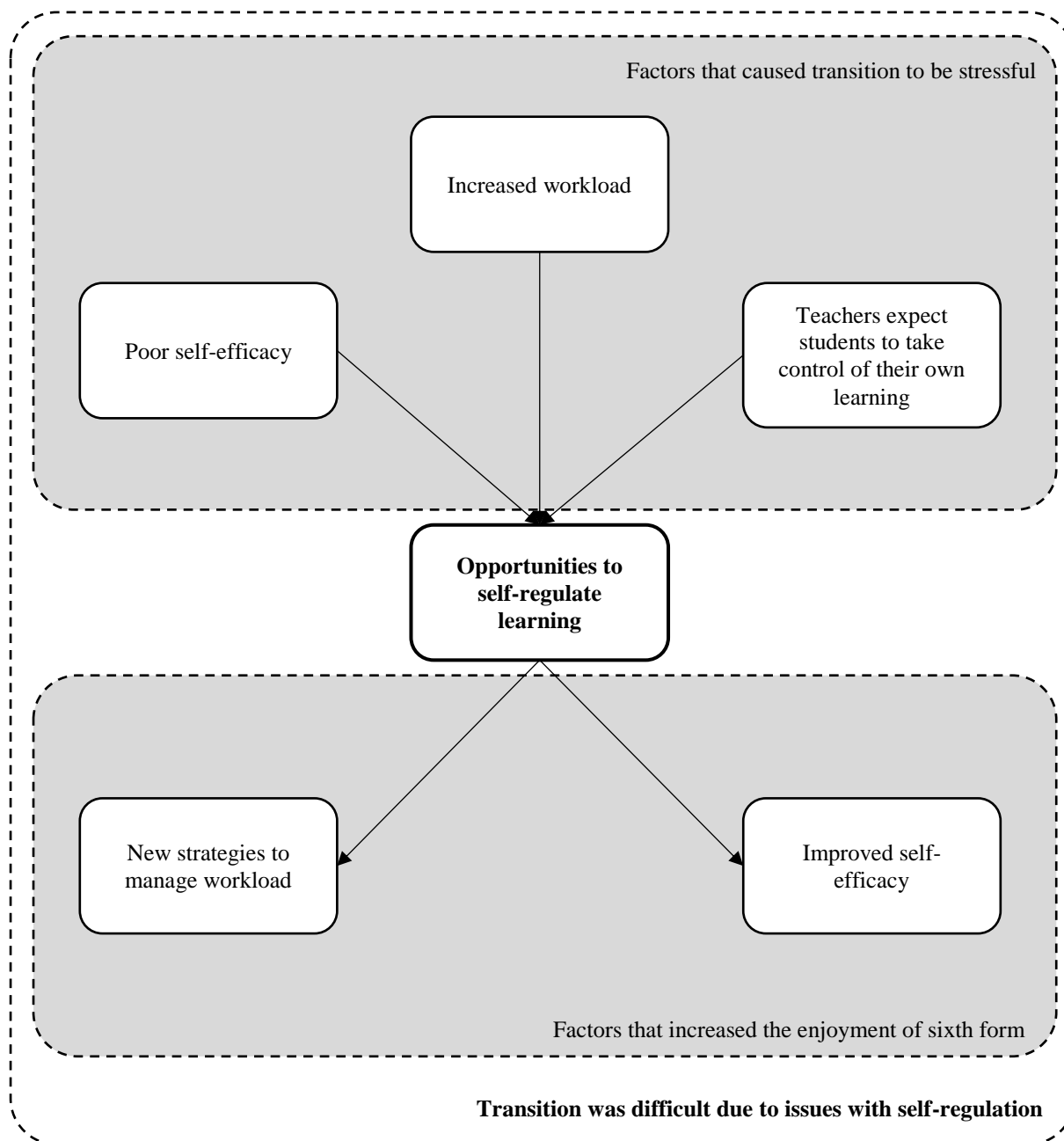


Figure 5.5: Themes associated with transition for Emily

It was the failure of these previously successful strategies and her inability to evaluate this and develop more effective ones that caused the greatest problems for Emily. Three key things seemed to reinforce and emphasise the failure of her working practices: her

understanding of teacher expectations, the significant increase in workload and comparison with peers.

Emily was a very good GCSE student, having gained A grades in both English and mathematics and another nine A* to C grades in other subjects. To help her achieve these grades, Emily had clear working patterns that helped her to cope with the demands of her GCSE subjects. This involved taking control and ensuring that she completed any work she was given on the same day that it was set. This meant that although she had to work after school, she was able to effectively keep up with all of the work given to her. Emily was clearly expecting the workload in the sixth form to be much greater. However, she seemed to make the assumption that her old working practices would suffice and all she would simply have to do would be to work in the evenings for longer. What she very quickly realised was that this model was not working and that her experience in year 11 was not useful preparation for the workload in the sixth form

You're not used to having so much homework so it can be quite hard to get it all done and in time for the deadlines. [Nov, 2013]

...before I could do it all in one evening and now I had to space it out depending on when it was due in and I wasn't used to having work left over. [Apr, 2014]

Her response was to work for longer, assuming that the issue was with her lack of effort rather than the way she was planning and prioritising work.

I didn't feel that I was working enough, I wasn't putting enough hours in and that I was up until midnight trying to fit it all in and I still wasn't finishing work and had to do it the next day. I felt like I was doing something wrong. [Apr, 2014]

Such working practices were clearly ineffective and the long hours were causing Emily to become increasingly fatigued and develop feelings of inadequacy. It can be argued that this was linked to Emily's view of her self-efficacy. For most students, high levels of perceived self-efficacy are likely to result in more time spent on tasks and high levels of motivation. Whilst this is usually a positive thing, in Emily's case, this actually led to a spiral in which she overworked to the extent that she failed to complete tasks because she was tired and

becoming less and less productive. Attribution theory too might help us to understand why Emily pursued such unsuccessful strategies for so long. Attribution theory explains how people make sense of the world by trying to understand past events and therefore make future ones more predictable and controllable. In Emily's case her explanation for prior success was the hard work and routines she had in place. It was therefore not unreasonable for her to try to employ these again to try to replicate similar success in the sixth form. What seems to be the issue is that Emily was unable to recognise that these working practices were inappropriate for work at A Level. She was clearly attributing her lack of success to a lack of effort. As such, her response was to simply increase the effort she was employing rather than considering the efficacy of her routines. It may be that she did not have a range of strategies to enhance her understanding of the work. Alternatively, if she did, felt too much pressure to give herself time to explore these and simply engaged in 'getting the job done'. It is clear that without a range of learning strategies, Emily was limiting her efficacy to cope with the demands of the workload in the sixth form.

Interestingly, there was significant stress for Emily around her relationship with her teachers. In the sixth form, Emily felt that teacher's expectations were that students would take greater ownership of their learning.

I think it's more the fact that opposed to the teachers feeding you the information you've actually got more of an active role in your workload and what you are doing, you're not just relying on the teacher anymore and you've got to sort start sorting everything out. [Apr, 2014]

This meant Emily actually felt very vulnerable. She was concerned that as teachers gave students more control, she might miss something and so would be unable to perform in examinations. To combat this feeling of loss of control, she retreated into the old tried and tested patterns of trying to ensure that she completed all work she was set on the night it was given to her. This reinforced Emily's sense of motivation as she now felt she had to work hard outside of lessons to make sure that she did not miss anything that teachers were expecting her to do.

I just feel like that in year 11 everything was given to you – you got a PPT and they'd explain everything to you, whereas now they say – I'll give you this, but you've got to go away and find the rest. [Apr, 2014]

At all times Emily sees her own motivation to complete her work outside of lessons as her primary goal. As her teachers expected the students to become more independent of them, Emily felt she now also had to, in effect, complete the extra work that in year 11 the teachers would have done for her. What she seems to have been unable to do is to set specific goals related to her activities. Without meaningful goals, Emily was removing any sort of opportunity to consider or monitor her learning in any meaningful way. As a result of this she was unable to make adaptations, and so was becoming increasingly fixed into her current mode of working. Essentially, Emily had become fixed on a performance goal, that is, the amount of work she was doing. For her to be effective, she needed to move away from this way of thinking and develop goals which emphasised the specific learning she needed to do to be prepared for her examinations.

The final factors that colluded to reinforce the issues that Emily was facing were the high workloads and comparisons she was drawing with her peers. Older friends and older siblings of her friends informed many of Emily's expectations of the sixth form. She was expecting high workloads and having to work late into her evenings and much of her weekends. The anxiety she was experiencing linked to her concern about missing something that her teachers would expect her to do outside-the-classroom reinforced the expectation that she should be doing significant amounts of work outside-of-class. Inevitably, she was starting to work until very late at night and becoming increasingly stressed as she was still failing to complete all of the tasks set to her. The social norms around her of friends working to similar very late hours and the stories from older siblings reinforced these negative patterns. It would appear that Emily was making negative outcome social comparisons with her peers that were undermining her self-esteem. As a result, Emily began to feel like she was doing something wrong and retreated further into these working patterns, simply trying to work harder and longer. This failed to produce the improvement she wanted to see and as she became increasingly stressed and fatigued, her results began to slip.

I didn't think what I was doing was abnormal – I thought it was quite normal and I had heard lots of stories about people working until 2am every night trying to get all of the work done – so I had in my mind that that's what I have got to do. [Apr, 2014]

The normalising influence of her peers seems to have been a barrier to Emily really thinking about her strategies and the ways she could improve them.

Emily says she felt settled in to the sixth form by Christmas and a significant turning point for her was the parents evening in January. It was only at this point that Emily really started to take greater control of her workload and managing the demands on her time. It was significant that this happened only after this intervention by the majority of her teachers. This occurred at the parents evening where she heard from successive teachers that how she was currently working was actually damaging and that she had to do something different.

It was just the way that all of the teachers were saying the same thing and it didn't feel like it was a lie and what they were saying was truthful and that I did need to start sorting myself out and so as soon as I got back I was trying to organise it all and I don't know it suddenly all fitted. [Apr, 2014]

Interestingly, Emily used the words '*this did not feel like a lie*'. It was clear that she had been getting similar messages before this, but was choosing to ignore them and try to carry on in the same way that she had been. For some reason, Emily was unwilling or perhaps unable to self-reflect. As such, she was constrained into a single way of working despite the negative impact this was having. By hearing the feedback from her teachers in the company of her parents, perhaps she felt that, for the first time, she had permission to break from her old habits and assess what she was doing and why. This moment forced Emily to be truly self-reflective and as such it seemed to allow her to change her learning behaviour. It was such an important moment that she went home that very night and began to think anew. It would appear that the repetition of the message she had to change from teachers across her curriculum seemed to be the key. From this point on she changed her working patterns and started to take control of her workload by assessing it clearly and making better judgements of herself and progress through her work. Because of her improved self-reflection, it was clear Emily was better able to manage her stress levels. In some ways hearing her teachers say what she was doing was not working was almost the reassurance she needed that it was

not her, but her strategies. It was as if they were giving her permission to reassess her outlook.

From the parents evening Emily seemed to manage her workload better and from here was able to work more efficiently. This point marked a significant change for her. It seems for the first time she was beginning to enjoy the independence of work in the sixth form. Her ability to prioritise work and relax about things that were left undone, meant that she was able to feel like she was back in control. New subjects were now seen as a challenge but an enjoyable one. Her initial feelings of being out of depth had now subsided and she was able to enjoy the sixth form. With experience and support, Emily felt like she was able to manage her workload.

...when you suddenly have to start doing things more yourself it can be stressful. But I think it's nicer because you're not relying on other people and you're kind of doing it yourself and learning things without too much help. [Nov, 2013]

Overall, it seems that for Emily her ability to self-reflect and therefore self-regulate her learning was the main feature of her transition. Whilst unable to do this effectively what should have been very positive attributes, such as a desire to achieve and motivation to work hard both inside and outside of class, became detrimental. With support from her teachers and an opportunity to reflect, Emily began to be able to prioritise tasks and enjoy the challenges of the sixth form and its role in helping her to prepare for life at university.

5.6 Harry

Harry is unique amongst the students I worked with as he re-sat year 12 and in doing so had two experiences of transition. For the sake of this analysis, it would seem useful to consider each transition in turn to identify the features that made each one different and how Harry was able to turn the issues of his first experience of transition into the successes of his second. The main effects on each of his transition experiences are shown below in Figure 5.6. Harry's narrative shows how much thought should be given to appropriate subject choice. Students need to feel that selecting subjects they enjoy and are good at will develop as many

chances as those that might feed into what may seem like more obviously lucrative subject areas. The level of challenge for most students is so great that a rather amorphous goal of ‘I might earn more money at the end of this’ is simply not enough to maintain the levels of motivation and commitment required.

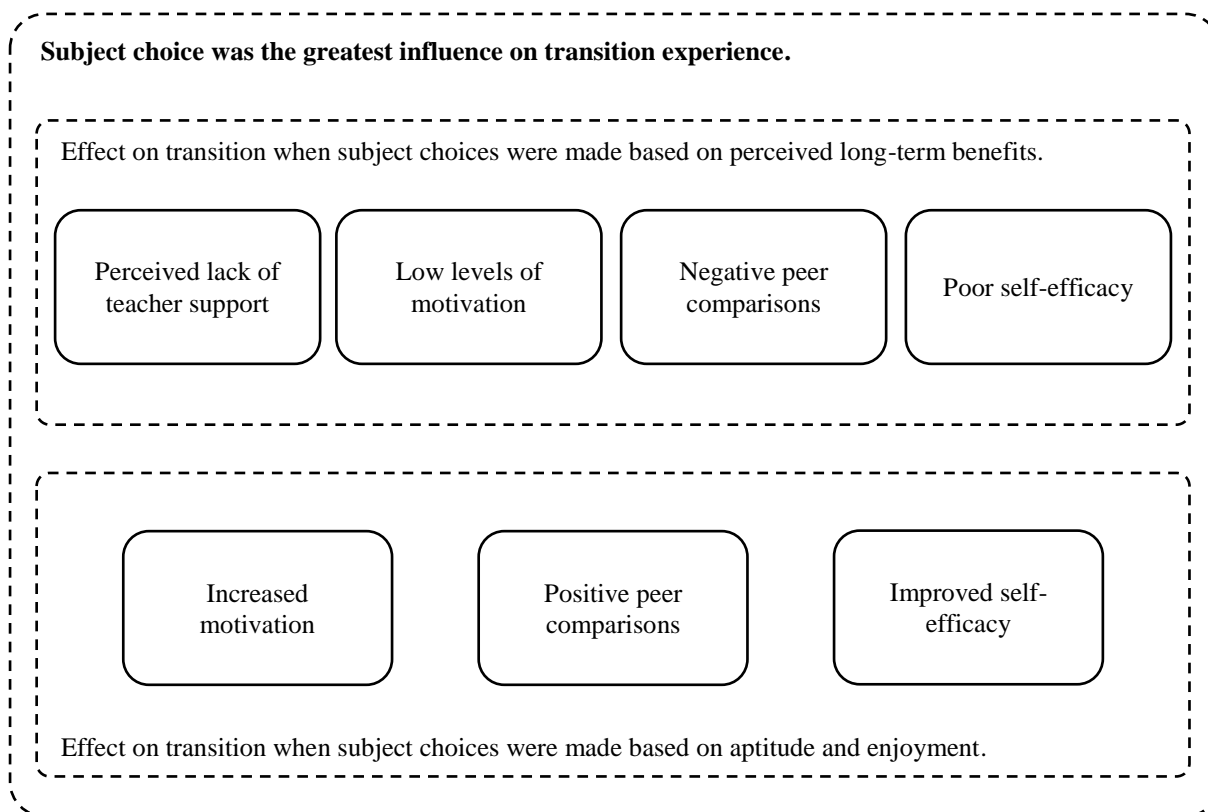


Figure 5.6: Themes associated with transition for Harry

For Harry the most significant element of his first experience of transition into the sixth form was the level of academic challenge. By selecting subjects that he felt that might lead to financial success rather than those he was good at, or genuinely enjoyed, he struggled when the level of challenge increased. Without an intrinsic enjoyment of his subjects and a rather amorphous long-term goal of them being a stepping stone towards a career with good financial prospects, Harry struggled with motivation and feelings of self-efficacy. Within a short period-of-time, he was quickly beginning to realise that he was not able to match the ability of his peers.

So even from the very start I was outmatched by everyone else in the class and it only got worse from there as the year went on [laughs]. Erm, but then like, it's almost like quite rewarding too because the moment when you do get something, it's amazing and

it's really satisfying. And suddenly you're on the same level, but that doesn't last long [laughs]. And so yeah the most challenging thing was definitely the work. [Jan, 2015]

This began to undermine his motivation for attempting to keep pace with his peers. Harry's poor self-efficacy in the subjects he took may have been compounded by the fact that he was clearly focusing on performance goals and his level of competence in comparison to the others in his classes. Perhaps in the subjects he was studying like maths and physics there were limited opportunities to engage in discourse about ideas and the theoretical development of knowledge. Instead, in these lessons there was a focus on whether or not you could 'do' the task at hand. Such performance focused classrooms are likely to enhance comparisons with peers, and if these are unfavourable, could lead to an undermining of feelings of self-efficacy and then motivation. This, in conjunction with his lack of enjoyment, meant that Harry began to realise that he may not want to continue with his chosen subjects. He had been startled by the level of academic challenge right from the start of the sixth form. This was particularly the case in maths where he felt outstripped from the beginning of his A Level course. The comparison with his peers, including his sister, meant that he was clear about his inability to keep pace. This was further compounded by the fact that he also had been provided with a private tutor and was still unable to cope.

It would appear that during his first experience of transition, Harry felt unsupported by his teachers. He thought that there should be more information for learners to explain what the level of challenge they should expect would be, but he was unsure how this should happen.

...they [teachers] tell you about how hard maths and physics is, but they don't really tell you how hard maths and physics is. Like, I don't think there is anything you can do to prepare for that and I definitely did not pick up on it after I knew I was dropping my grades. But, I dunno like, it's so much more a lot of work. For maths, even if you think you understand something in the lesson, you have to go over it afterwards. And they like don't tell you how absolutely compulsory that is. I'm not sure I know how they can make that more serious, because I don't think I would have listened to it back then, but they need to find a way I think because they're difficult subjects. [Jan, 2015]

In discussing the period before making the final decision to re-sit year 12, Harry said he spent a month where he tried to work harder and focus more. At the end of this time, he felt he still

had made no progress and it was at this point he made the decision to give up and re-sit. It is interesting when talking about this month-long period that all he referred to were things like working harder and getting his head down. There was no attempt to try anything new or ask for help. Perhaps without the intrinsic motivation for his subjects, there was simply not the impetus for him to try anything different. Since this was also his final attempt at convincing himself to either stay or repeat, this may also have been the reason for a lack of change of strategy. By completing this month, it meant he could offer re-sitting as a defensive reaction in order to preserve his self-image and justify his withdrawal from his current courses.

I'd say about half way through year 12 I went through a phase where, for about a month I got my head down and I said I wasn't going to re-sit and that definitely wasn't going to happen to me. And I worked for a month really hard, like I put a lot of effort in and in the end I was no-where closer to anything and so I gave up. I was like this is it, I'm just going to re-sit. So I was definitely thinking about it then and what options I would do, and just getting by in school and I didn't really talk to my parents about it until January of last year. [Jul, 2015]

It was interesting that it was his external maths tutor with whom he first discussed restarting year 12. Perhaps this was because she was separate from the situation in school, which made him feel able to discuss this with her without judgement or undermining his status with peers, parents or his siblings. The fact that Harry made the decision to re-sit shows an ability to assess his situation and take proactive steps in order to succeed. To this point, Harry seemed to have been unable to effectively regulate his learning and take control of his academic progress. Making the decision to restart seems to be the first piece of evidence that he was able to effectively self-assess and then make his own decisions about how best to proceed.

In the early stages of his first transition, Harry found great social support from his peers. He felt that having the shared experience of the challenge of moving into the sixth form was good. They shared strategies and were able to discuss the more challenging elements of transition together. After deciding to re-take the year, he began to become more socially detached from his peers. This was particularly the case as their paths began to diverge as towards the end of year 12 most of his friends began applying for university and preparing themselves for this.

Having decided to re-sit, Harry chose to study a range of new subjects. This time he chose subjects that he was interested in and had shown aptitude for in year 11. He had come to the decision that by doing things he enjoyed he could then pursue a degree that he could be successful in and that that in itself would open up career opportunities. This was a complete reversal to the way he selected his subjects initially. No longer were they a means to an end, instead they were chosen based on the way in which they engaged and motivated him, and as such he had an intrinsic motivation for.

You should chose the A Levels you like and are good at, rather than the ones you want to be good at and you should go from there, because then you will find a degree you like and it will all spiral from there. Cos like I'd say there's nothing worse, because when you start A Levels, you're effectively starting university, you're effectively starting what you are going to study at uni so when you chose those A Levels, you are choosing what you are going to do for the next six years of your life and it is so important you do something you enjoy rather than something you know will make you money 'cos the hope of money in six years' time will not get you through A Level, but being happy will and being happy will help you do well if you are happy. [Jul, 2015]

When discussing his current subjects, the language Harry used was very different – he talked about his enjoyment and passion for these and how he had enjoyed the challenges they presented, instead of being outclassed and underperforming. Clearly, due to his intrinsic enjoyment Harry had not struggled during his second transition with motivation. He took a different view of the level of academic challenge and began to employ strategies that helped him to cope with this. Now when faced with a lack of skill, such as in English, Harry took a much more reflective view whereby he had to redevelop existing skills from GCSE and adapt these for A Level. Rather than seeing areas for development as a source of unfavourable peer comparison, he was now feeling much more self-efficacious. He also began to pro-actively seek out support and guidance when he needed it, showing that he was able to monitor his own learning and attain support. Harry also enjoyed the increased informality and support from teachers. It was interesting that his interpretation of their additional support was due to a shared commitment from both teachers and students. Harry felt that he benefitted from their support and willingness to share their time and expertise.

Well they know that you are committed to that subject, that you only chose four and one of those four is their subject. So they know you care about it as much if not more than they do. So I think they are more willing to give up their time because they feel it will be well spent in the long run, and it will be helpful. [Jan, 2015]

In his second transition, Harry was for the first time at the same level and in some respects at an advantage in comparison to his peers. To some extent, he had already developed the coping strategies necessary to deal with the transition into the sixth form. By having selected subjects he was good at, Harry now felt that he was on a par. In some respects his slight social isolation during lessons at the beginning of his second attempt at year 12 was a benefit as it meant he was able to focus and quickly achieve, so enhancing his levels of motivation and sense of self-efficacy. He also had both the support of existing friendship groups as well as the time to build up new relationships before his old friends left for university whilst he remained at school.

I didn't feel as much pressure with the subjects because I know it's a bit arrogant, but I knew I was good at them, I know I could walk in there and I'd be on the same level as everyone else and I could understand what was being said. I work best when I am sitting on my own, either quietly or with my music in. so being kind of isolated at the start, not knowing anyone meant I sat on my own and it meant that I worked quite well. So I got the satisfaction from working well in my lessons, and then especially last year in my frees and break and lunch I could still talk to my friends from last year, the guys I have known for a long time. So the transition was easy because of that and then eventually those people leave as they have done now, but I had a full year to build up new friendships with new people, and so there hasn't been a transition, it's been pretty smooth. [Jan, 2015]

5.7 James

The social transition for James was a smooth process. He felt well supported by the induction days, which allowed him to understand the expectations of the sixth form. James felt that the social element of the sixth form was easy, finding friends easily and feeling that he settled in quickly. James appeared to enter the sixth form with a renewed sense of purpose. By his own admission, he had underperformed in his GCSEs and had been shocked by his poor results. He had to think carefully about his future plans and discussed this in depth with his parents before returning to school. This attitude change is clearly reflected in many statements James made throughout his interviews. As well as his own change in attitude, a significant factor for James appears to be the role of teacher support. For the first time he was able to view his teachers as a means of help which he could access when required. James was also enjoying academic success, which reinforced his new sense of achievement. The main elements of his transition are shown in Figure 5.7.

Prior to the sixth form James struggled academically. Large class sizes and lack of direct teacher support meant that James found it easier to engage more with friends rather than focus on learning. Because of this, he underperformed in his GCSEs. James failed to pass five or more GCSEs at A*–C grade and so had to embark on Level 2 (GCSE equivalent) courses in the sixth form, rather than A Levels. This failure was an important point for James. It forced him to re-evaluate what he was doing and consider his future path because his GCSE results had been so poor. This meant he took time to consider what he wanted to do and what he needed to do to achieve this. He did this in conjunction with his parents who clearly played a significant role in supporting him.

I had a really bad results day and it kind of changed from there really. I talked to my parents about everything and it kind of changed for me. I started to knuckle down more and feeling good about getting good results. [Nov, 2013]

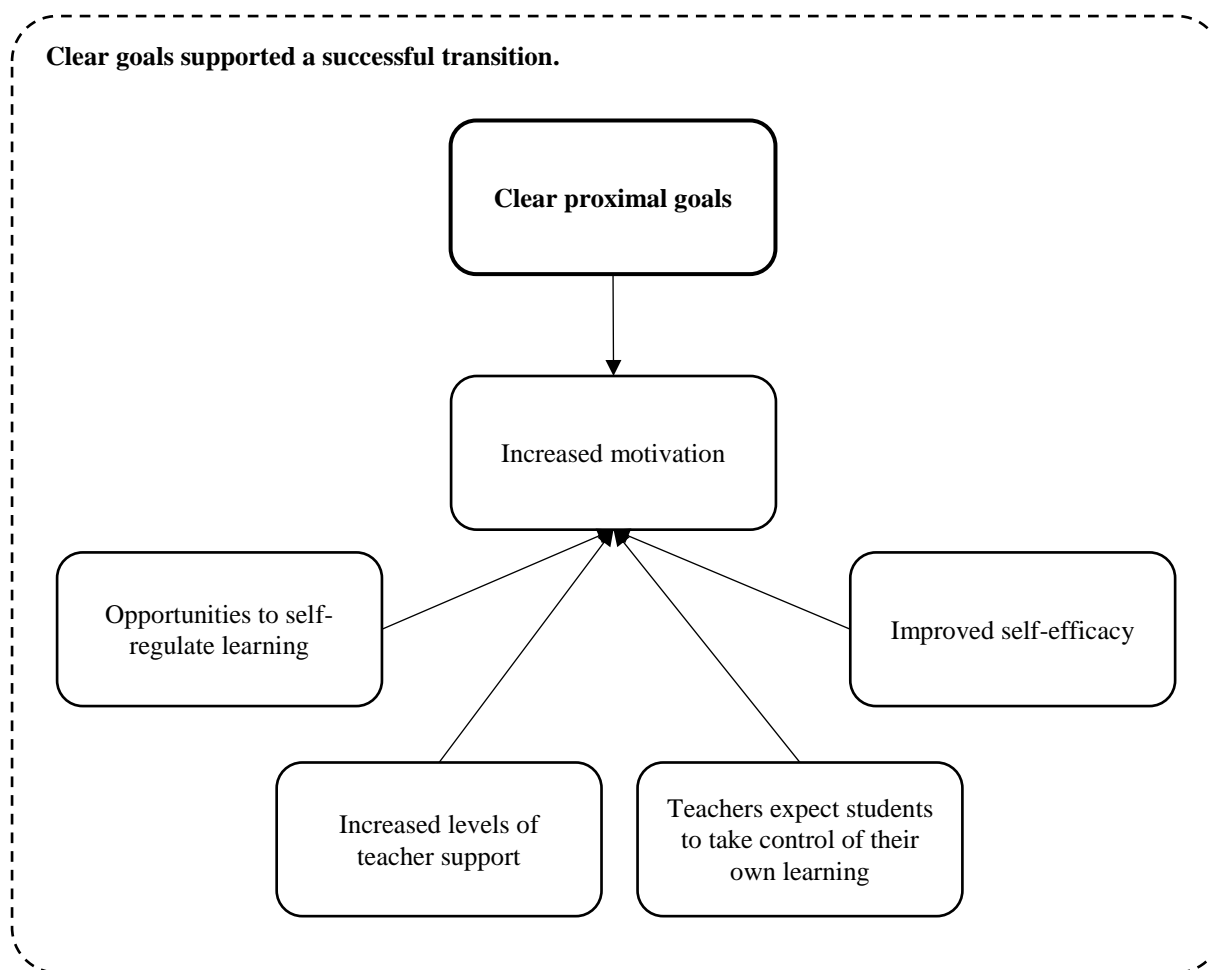


Figure 5.7: Themes associated with transition for James

Having thought carefully over the holiday and spoken with his parents, James decided that he wanted to go to college to study a film course. This meant that he needed to spend a year in the sixth form to achieve a range of Level 2 courses in order to meet the entry requirements of the college. For the first time, James had specific, proximal goals he could work towards and his academic studies had a clear utility. This had a positive impact on his motivation as he had specific competencies that he could work towards being able to demonstrate.

James felt that he settled in well and had enjoyed the increased freedom and responsibility. He was quickly able to make friends and felt that his transition was well supported through things like the induction days in July. Being on Level 2 courses also helped James as he felt that the curriculum was accessible and specifically relevant to his desired future choices. The biggest change for James was his relationships with teachers. For the first time he saw teachers as a source of support and in being able to rely on this James quickly became involved in a cycle of success and was more positive about his academic progress. He was

clearly beginning to feel increasingly self-efficacious, which was providing a positive spiral of self-motivation and interest. Now in a more positive academic environment, James was able to identify what attributes led to his failure to perform at GCSE. That he could do this and avoid repeating these mistakes showed that he had been able to develop his academic self-perception. James was able to understand the range of academic tasks he had to undertake as well as the strategies to employ and their relative success. All of this meant that he developed a positive mental state and was keen to do well and not repeat the mistakes he made in year 11.

Although James had clearly enjoyed the independence of the sixth form, he did find this hard to begin with. Teacher expectations had shifted and he was now expected to do his work and ask for help if needed. The teacher role was no longer to lead the lesson but to set students up on tasks and then support them through these when necessary. Teachers facilitating reinforced for James the necessity for him to be autonomous and take control of his learning. This was only successful for James because he felt that whenever he needed support it was available for him, and therefore he felt able to persist when faced with difficulties.

James also enjoyed the more relaxed relationships teachers had with sixth-form students and as a result felt much more able to ask for help. This was because they did not have to exert so much control over their classes as the learners were more focused and wished to engage with their learning.

The teachers are more relaxed now, they don't have to be more like strict, they're very relaxed and they let you get on with your work. Obviously, they give you tasks to do and then you have to do them yourself. Obviously they give you help if you need it, but it's erm, it's very do it yourself now. You need your responsibility to do your own work and that is what I find different in the sixth form.

By having access to academic support, James was able to focus on tasks and achieve positive outcomes. He enjoyed these feelings of success and this further encouraged him to work harder and move on. A number of things had enhanced teacher support. Smaller class sizes meant James felt more visible to teachers – when he needed help he did not have to wait and the help he received was of better quality because there was more time to discuss this with his teachers. He also felt they were more approachable. James also felt that classes were

generally more focused with students in them who wanted to be there, so removing the possible routes for work avoidance he would once have engaged with in year 11. James also benefitted from informal mentoring. The mentoring James received provided regular opportunities for him to talk about his whole curriculum experience, supporting him to strategise and problem solve. With this teacher support, James felt he had the tools to be successful. As such, this led him into a positive cycle where the enjoyment he was experiencing linked to his successes, which emphasised his desire to continue to work hard and succeed further.

Both his peers and teachers offered effective models, which during his GCSEs, James did not encounter. These models supported James's increased levels of motivation as well as his feelings of self-efficacy.

In year 11 I didn't really have much support as I did now and it kind of boosted my confidence in lessons and to do my work and stuff. In year 11 I didn't have that, it was just like really, it wasn't strict, but it was like you have to do this and you do this. If you need help just ask. But it wasn't like help, help. [The head of sixth form] would sit me down and be like how's your day? How's maths been? How's this? [Nov, 2013]

James underwent a significant change in attitude from year 11. Previously he was happy to allow himself to become distracted in class, but that had changed and he was much more focused. This was reinforced by teacher expectations in the sixth form that students take increased responsibility for their learning. James repeatedly refers to the opportunities for independent work and decision making as important skills. It was interesting that his focus on a goal outside of the school environment had enhanced James's awareness of skills for adult life. The sorts of routines and expectations in the sixth form also reinforced much of this more adult approach. Simple things such as being allowed to wear his own clothes, being allowed off site at lunch and the opportunity to do his own things in his free periods all reinforced James's view of the sixth form as a more adult environment. He was keen to use all of these opportunities to develop the skills he felt were necessary to his life outside of school.

... you're given free periods to do what you please and it's your responsibility what to do. So you could work or you could go out or something. That gives you your choice and that's what you kind of need later in life to have your own responsibilities. [Apr, 2014]

5.8 Liz

Liz found the increased academic demands of her subjects and the increased workload the biggest challenges of moving into the sixth form. Unlike in year 11, she had to be more diligent in reviewing her notes and familiarising herself with the content after lessons to be able to cope with, and feel effective in, following lessons. Despite the challenges, Liz felt that she received good teacher support and enjoyed the increasingly independent and adult way students were treated in the sixth form. The themes of her transition are summarised in Figure 5.8. Liz found both the quantity of work in the sixth form and the level of challenge difficult to manage. Unlike in year 11, when she could go to lessons without having reviewed or truly assimilated the knowledge from the previous ones, Liz found that was no longer the case.

...you have to write a lot more detail and there is a lot more reading over you have to do, like you can't just go to a lesson and then go to one a week later and like you won't remember what you did last week. And that like has a big difference. [Jan, 2015]

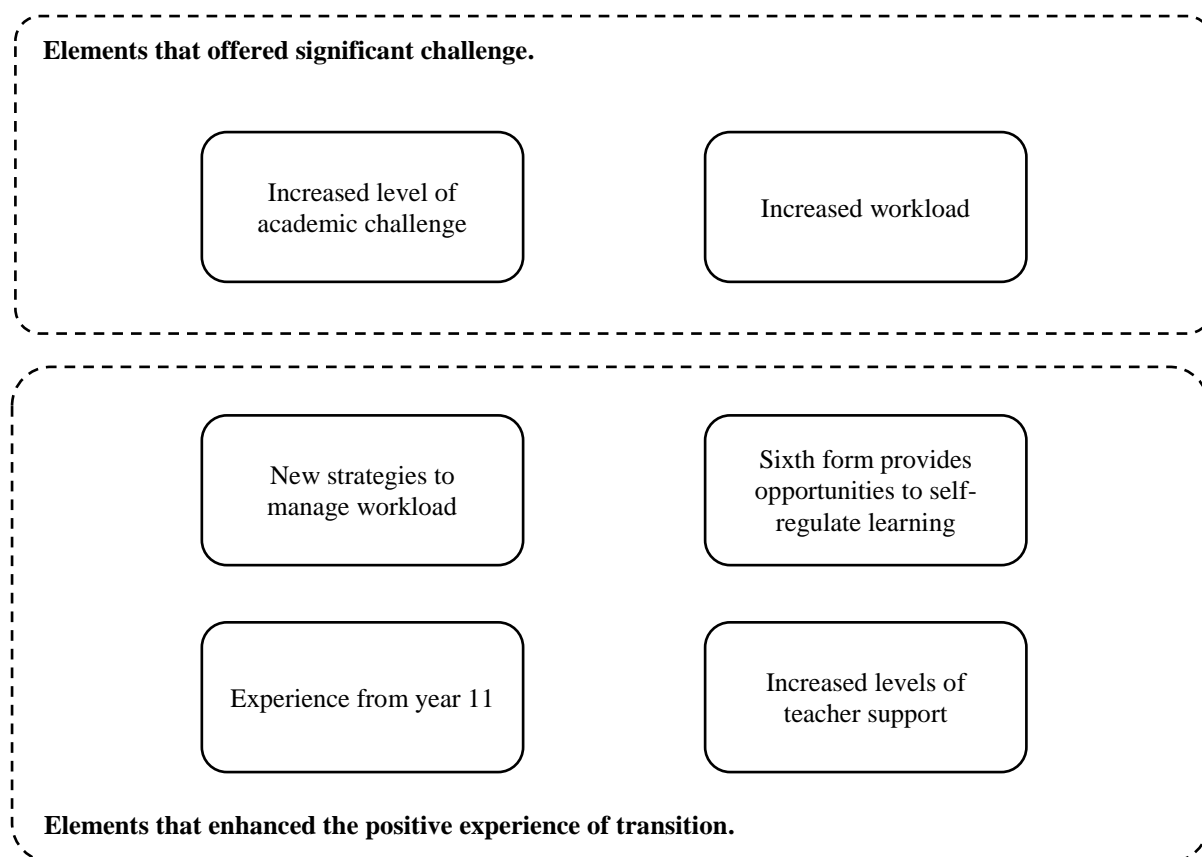


Figure 5.8: Themes associated with transition for Liz

Liz also identified the significant increase in the level of demand and how much work was being covered in each lesson. Due to being in a county level sports programme, Liz missed one day a week of school to attend training sessions. She very quickly realised that she had to be very careful about ensuring that she caught up this material, as teachers would not spend time in lessons covering content they had already delivered.

I sort of found if you missed a lesson it almost felt like you missed a week just because each teacher covers so much of the course and cos they sort of start activities and say finish it for HMWK just because you have to fit it in, so if you miss – like I miss a lesson in Geography each week and catching up was definitely quite hard, but luckily all of the teachers put up the resources and stuff. So it's easy to catch up like if you do it straight away but if you leave it, even a week like cos they, as soon as you go to the next lesson they're carrying on what they've already done and you don't really know what they are going on about. [Jul, 2015]

For her to feel efficacious, Liz now had to spend more time reviewing her notes and going over key concepts to ensure that she could understand subsequent lessons. To do this, she developed new ways of working based on her self-evaluation of what she was remembering from lesson to lesson and also her performance in early tests to assess understanding from the first few weeks of lessons. Having realised that she was struggling with the amount of content she had to learn, Liz began to develop strategies to help her retain the information and to be ready for following lessons. She felt that this was reinforced by her teachers who also stressed the need for students to be able to apply information they had dealt with in earlier lessons to subsequent ones.

... possibly, from the first couple of weeks it [pressure to review work] wasn't really there, and then they [teachers] started doing tests or just say four weeks in and we went back to the first week, to go over stuff, no one really remembered things because of the amount of depth we went into, it was sort of then that we ourselves realised and teachers started to drill into us that we need to read over all the time. [Jan, 2015]

Liz quickly adapted to the increasing demands of the sixth form. She developed an understanding that her success at GCSE would not simply translate to A Level and therefore, began developing new strategies to manage her work and ensure that she was retaining the information.

An A at GCSE, or an A is like a D at A Level, so I was like woah, that did shock me a bit and I realised I had to work a lot harder to get just even like a C, so I think that was a big ... I think if I hadn't been told that at the beginning of the year I wouldn't have necessarily been not relaxed at all, but on it a bit sooner. [Jul, 2015]*

Liz had clearly been trying to use a range of strategies to help her handle the subject content of her courses so that she felt prepared for the examinations. She had very clear goals for after school and was regularly reviewing her progress towards these. The new strategies she had developed meant that she clearly felt in control of her own learning.

I've worked out that mind maps really help me, like especially when I was revising for geography. We learn four sections and then with each of those sections Miss X and Mrs Y gave us titles and so for like a page in the revision guide I was able to do a mind map

for each page which really helped me puts everything together, but I like actually. 'Cos I only did it on A4 so that I made sure that I didn't put anything on I didn't need.

[Jul, 2015]

At GCSE I did like revise but it wasn't heavy, so now I'm kind of like what works for me? And I know that I learn better from writing, like I'm not a reading learner. So I just started it and it worked. [Jul, 2015]

Despite the increased workload and academic demand, Liz enjoyed the increased independence and autonomy of the sixth form. This was in large part to the value she placed on her A Levels as a means to achieve a place at university. Interestingly she felt there was less pressure in the sixth form when compared to GCSE. At GCSE, she felt all of her teachers were pushing her to perform and attain her target grades. Although her A Levels were important to be able to access the university courses she wanted to study, Liz actually felt there was less pressure from teachers in the sixth form. This meant that she felt greater personal responsibility for her learning. Her A Levels were important and because her teachers were not checking on the progress and completion of work, Liz now felt that it was her role. If she wanted to do well she needed to work harder.

... because a lot of the teachers are expecting you to just read over and do your work and things like that and say if you don't do it – it's not their A Levels it's yours, but at the same time I think it has a sort of reverse psychology on you because you're expecting them to be angry and they're not, so you're like Oh, and that motivates you a bit at the same time. [Jan, 2015]

Perhaps her confidence to be able to do this was because she still felt that if she needed it teacher support was there.

I think because there is less people in a class you naturally get more support. Erm, and because they have, although teachers don't have much time they do make as much time for you as possible because they know how hard A Levels are and how much content there is, so as much as you want to get through the course they do as well, so they're always there to help. [Jul, 2015]

Therefore, although the expectation was that students should become more independent and responsible, support was still there if they needed it. For Liz this was helped by her feelings of self-efficacy, particularly around examinations. She felt that in this case, her year 11 examinations had prepared her for the experience of examinations at the end of her AS Levels. She felt like she had experience of how to prepare for these and how to manage her time.

I think in year 11 because it is your first time going through the exams I think that is why everyone was more stressed, whereas at A Level everyone has been through it and so knows what to expect, they know what's coming and they know that they need to work and how to manage their time and stuff. [Jan, 2015]

5.9 Nancy

Nancy experienced a significant increase in workload during her transition into the sixth form. In order to cope with this, she made changes to the ways that she worked in order to be able to prioritise and organise her activities. Throughout the transition she felt well supported by her teachers who were available for help when needed. See Figure 5.9 for a full summary of the elements which made up her experience of transition.

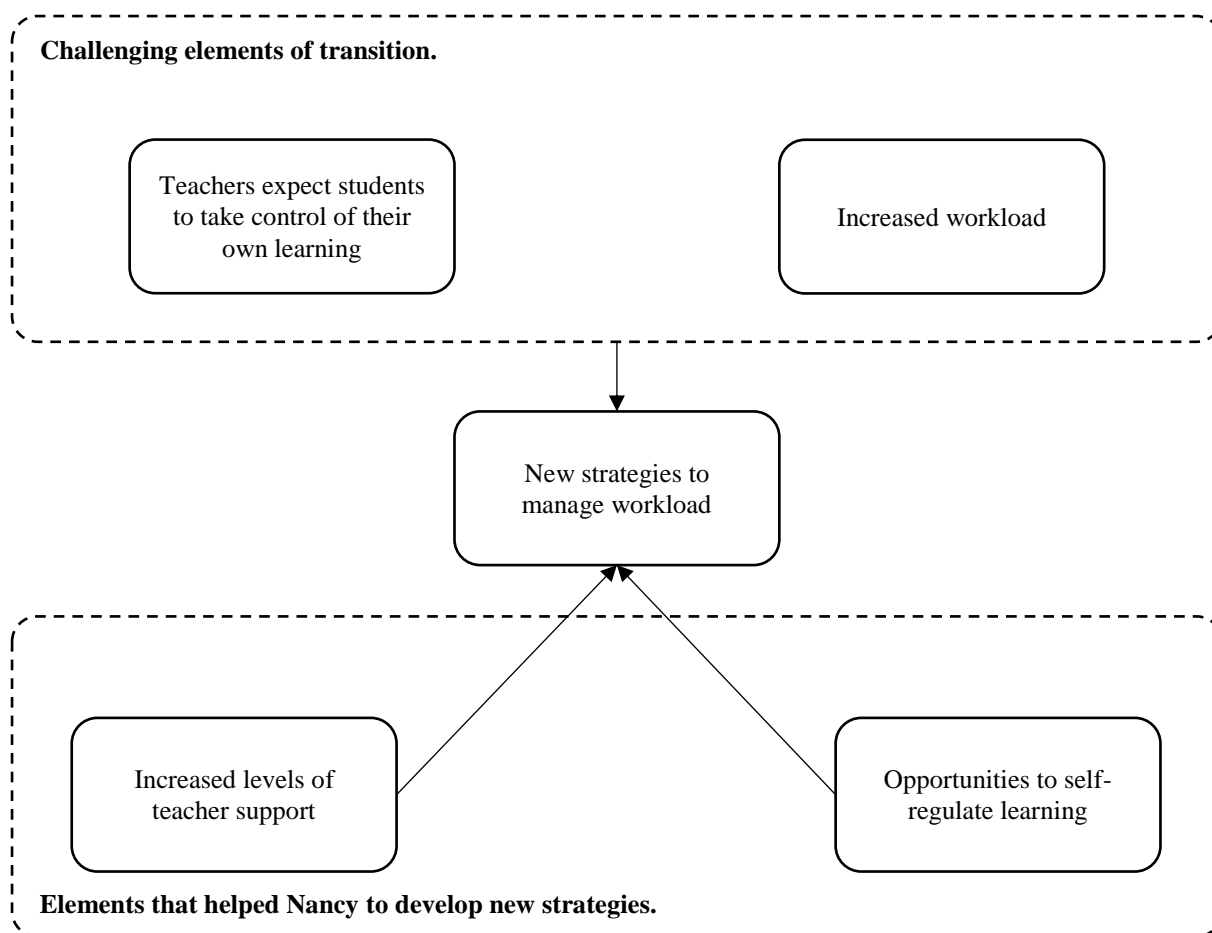


Figure 5.9: Themes associated with transition for Nancy

Nancy was surprised by the amount of work that faced her when moving into the sixth form. She felt this was not only the amount of work involved but also the expectation that students should take more responsibility and be capable of dealing with greater levels of challenge. Nancy coped well in year 11. She discussed not having to do much work or needing to do much revision for exams. This was perhaps in part due to the two-year nature of the GCSEs that allowed for a more gradual development of levels of challenge and student skills in comparison to AS Levels, which are completed in a year. Her experience of year 11 workload and pressure was in clear contrast to her experience of sixth form where she had to do much more to keep up to date and start exam preparation much earlier.

I think teachers expect more from you, like especially when you pick up a new subject they expect you to have background knowledge of the subject and stuff, erm so yeah I think you get thrown in at the deep end a bit. [Jan, 2015]

... in like the duration of year 11 you didn't do much work, there's little bits of coursework you have to do but you don't really revise. But erm, you find in sixth form you have to revise earlier to get the knowledge in so you'll be ready for the exams. [Jan, 2015]

To cope with the new workload, Nancy was able to develop new working strategies. These included reviewing notes, doing wider reading and reducing the amount of time spent on other activities like watching television to make room for the extra work she needed to do. What was interesting was that Nancy seemed to be able to regulate her new workload easily. She did not describe any difficulty with these things, she was able to simply assess the new workload and consider the strategies she felt most useful to be able to manage. The fact that she was able to give up things that she would normally enjoy in order to complete her work shows that she places a high value on her studies and the utility they provided for her future aspirations.

[talking about how she has coped with the change in workload] Just go over the notes for the lesson, to have a read of the textbooks and stuff like that, and look on line as well. I just end up doing more work, like start earlier and just cut out things that you would normally do like watch TV, just do your HMWK and stuff. [Jan, 2015]

Nancy felt that she had good support from her teachers. They helped to make the courses accessible by supporting student self-monitoring processes such as organising scrutinies of work. This modelled and encouraged self-assessment by students. By being able to understand the progress she was making and receiving feedback on how to improve her work, Nancy was able to reinforce her feelings of self-efficacy which had positive effects on her motivation. The fact that she felt that her teachers were more accessible and had more time to spend with students meant that she felt confident that when she did need support, she could access it.

I don't know I just found year 11 a lot easier in terms of the lessons and stuff [long pause] I don't know you just seem to get more support in sixth form from teachers though I find, 'cos classes seem to be a lot smaller so you get more support. [Jan, 2015]

Nancy also felt that the relationships with her teachers and her peers also reinforced the more independent and adult nature of the sixth form. She mentioned that she felt there was less monitoring of things like homework completion in the sixth form than in comparison with year 11. She explained this as homework in the sixth form was there to benefit students and the only people who were negatively affected by not completing this was the students. This autonomy and movement away from performance focused goals such as homework completion and quality seems to reinforce a mastery goal approach. This was further emphasised when Nancy spoke about her peer relationships in the sixth form and the way they too promoted student responsibility and autonomy. Nancy outlined that students who had stayed on in the sixth form were studying A Levels because they would lead onto future opportunities such as university and work. She was herself, clearly motivated by this, but also spoke about the opportunity to study A Levels as a preparation for the independent work she would be expected to carry out at university. For Nancy therefore, her A Levels and the extra work she did had two values – one was the accreditation they offered her for entry into university, but the second, more implicit value were the skills she was developing for independent learning and study.

... if you are at the sixth form, you're obviously here to get good A Levels and stuff, you're not here to mess around so I think you do need that independence, especially if you're want to go to uni and stuff if you have no independence in sixth form then it's going to be like complete change of lifestyle and shock. [Jul, 2015]

5.10 Owen

Owen had a very unexpected start to his transition into the sixth form. He had assumed that he had sufficient GCSE passes to allow him to take the A Level courses he had planned to. He found out during his readmission interview that this was not the case and so he had to significantly alter his plans and start on Level 2 courses instead of A Levels. Figure 5.10 shows a summary of the main themes of Owens' experience of transition into the sixth form.

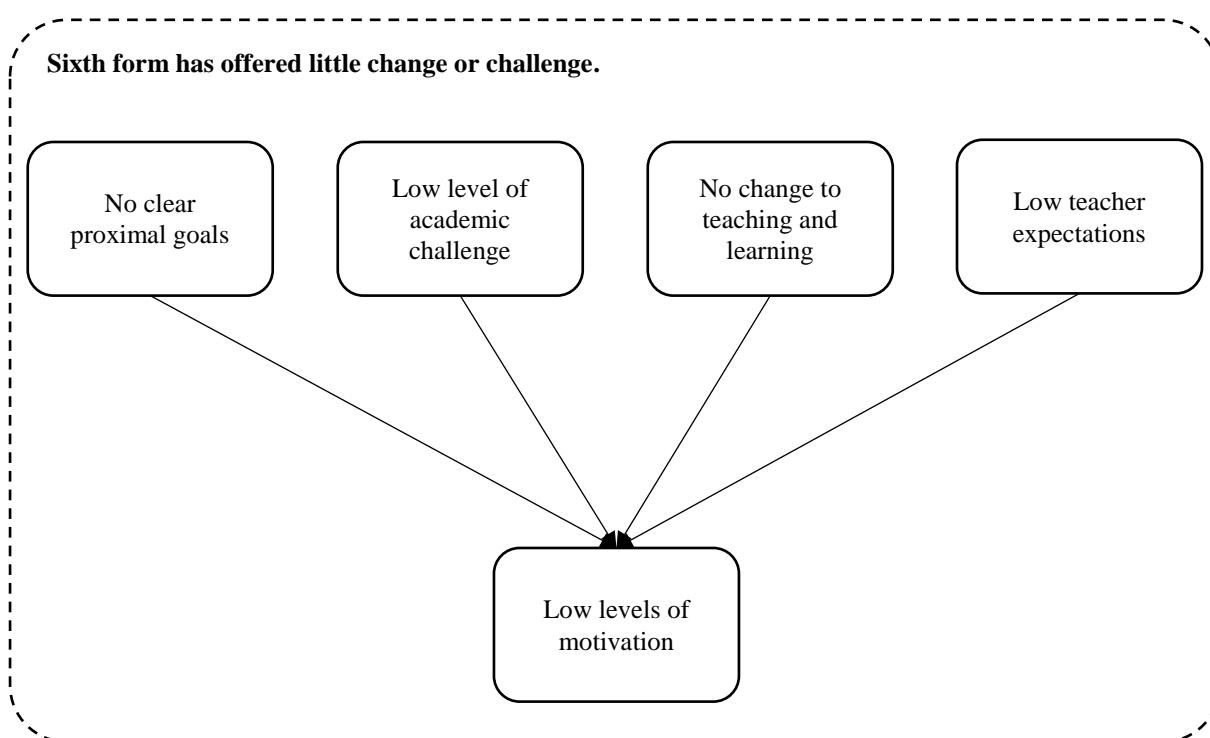


Figure 5.10: Themes associated with transition for Owen

For Owen, the most significant challenge of transition into the sixth form was dealing with the news that he had to alter his plans. This will have come as a great shock as he was clearly convinced he had the five GCSE passes sufficient to study his A Level courses. In finding out on the day of his readmission interview, Owen had not had the opportunity to mentally prepare for this change, or discuss this with his family. It meant that he had to deal with the disappointment in a public arena and accept a very different curriculum and therefore direction.

I was all geared up for A Levels after our results – I thought I had got five A–Cs, but it turned out that I had got less than that. But I thought I did, I did going away from*

trying to keep it hassle free I did protest and say I have got 5 as I did get five Cs in different subjects, but they disagreed because they said they were the same subject areas. Like I would have got two in the same subject area. [Apr, 2014]

This clearly fed into his experience of transition. He was unable to speak in any great depth in his interviews about what he was enjoying about the move into the sixth form. He clearly felt that having to do the Level 2 (GCSE equivalent) courses was not what he wanted and spoke about having to do these in order to stay on and complete A Levels afterwards. Owen did not talk about any goals or thoughts about what he wanted to do after his time in sixth form. He had no clear goals other than to complete his current courses and then stay in the sixth form to do A Levels. He was not specific about why he wanted to stay and do this, given that this would mean committing an extra year in school.

I'll have to do the Level 2 regardless but then I think I'll stay on here to do maybe Level 3 and see what happens afterwards. [Nov, 2013]

Owen clearly had a similar mind-set than he did in year 11. He was the only student not to mention increased independence, workload or changes in teacher expectations as part of his transition. Other than having free periods, the common room and no longer having to wear a uniform, there seems to have been little change for Owen.

I don't have a problem keeping up with the workload cos I'm used to it. Time management isn't really a problem, there isn't really that much of a problem, cos it's a bit like year 11. [Nov, 2013]

Owen appears not to have been able to set clear goals for himself in the sixth form. As such, he had not provided for himself the opportunity to monitor his progress towards them. This meant there were no opportunities for him to celebrate his successes, which should have had a positive impact on motivation. Owen did not appear to be motivated by his studies in the sixth form. He talked about simply operating as he did as a GCSE student. Perhaps as the type of academic tasks he was experiencing in the sixth form were similar to those at GCSE, he was unable to attach any utility to these. They did not help him in year 11, so why should they do so now? A lack of utility may explain why Owen had not experienced any great motivation or desire to approach his learning differently in the sixth form.

Owen felt his experience of teaching and learning in the sixth form was similar to the experience he had during GCSE. The only real differences he could identify were the smaller class sizes and the corresponding increased access to teacher attention in lessons. It was clear from his comments that he was simply behaving the same as he did in year 11.

In truth, I find Level 2 a little bit easier than year 11, purely because there's less subjects to concentrate on so a little bit less work, but the work usually gets done.

[Apr, 2014]

As such, it would appear that Owen had been unable to reflect on the strategies he employed in year 11 and consider why they did not work effectively. He could not monitor his performance effectively or correctly attribute the issues in his previous studies to the results he achieved. Being unable to do these things meant that Owen's level of learning was unlikely to improve and that he may not be able to achieve success in his current Level 2 courses. Part of the issue may be associated with the subjects he was studying. These did not seem to offer any increased challenge or workload, so he was able to operate in the same way as he did as a student in year 11. In effect, there was nothing (other than his own ability to reflect on his poor results from year 11) to force him to change the way that he approached his learning. Perhaps Owen withdrew from opportunities to develop his understanding as a form of self-protection. This was likely given his disappointment in his performance after his GCSEs. If you are unable to attribute failure to something specific, or feel efficacious to be able to change that which caused the failure, then feelings of self-satisfaction are likely to be low, leading to a fall in motivation and potential future efforts to learn. As Owen was not engaging in a new way, he risked failing again.

Owen reinforced this lack of change when he discussed free periods. These for Owen were simply time to complete any homework; they were not for independent work, or discussions with peers to support understanding or development of ideas. As such it was clear that his ability to self-direct, control or positively influence his learning environment was limited.

[In free periods] If I have any work to do I finish it and then not really much else we do.

[Nov, 2013]

The lack of distinction in Owen's experience between year 11 and year 12 was shown when he spoke about the types of lessons he was experiencing. Here he described being set tasks that he completes in the lesson, in exactly the same way that he did in year 11.

The teaching, like teaching in general is pretty much the same. [Nov, 2013]

Owen was therefore unlikely to be motivated to make significant changes to the way he approached his learning as the environment he was in reinforced the previously adopted patterns of behaviour. He had maintained his reliance on his teachers to direct his learning. He did not refer to having to work independently in the lessons or outside of them.

[Talking about how he works in lessons] *Oh, like instructions written on the whiteboard that we have to do, usually because after that we just get on with it.*
[Apr, 2015]

Perhaps Owen's lack of independence was due to the type of lessons he was exposed to. If students are not provided with the opportunities to engage in independent, student-led activities, it is unlikely that they will be able to do this independently.

Owen's attitude may have been a result of the way he dealt with the disappointment of not being able to study his A Levels. It would appear that Owen was simply using this year to be able to move onto A Levels. In essence he was repeating year 11 to get the grades he needed to progress. As he was focusing on fewer subjects at an academic level he was used to, sixth form for Owen was easier than year 11. As such, there had been no pressure for him to develop new ways of working. In addition, the way his teachers were working with him were also the same as year 11. Their expectations of him were therefore also similar to what he experienced previously. His lessons appeared teacher driven, with no push for students to become more independent and take charge of their own learning. Consequently, he did not have to develop working strategies to become more independent or deal with the increased demands of study he would encounter when he moved onto A Levels.

I'm doing level twos at the moment so it, it's the same sort of workload probably, it's just a little, it's just a little different, I'm not doing level three right now so I don't know what the workload would be like, but I'm coping with it quite well, yeah. [Nov, 2013]

[talking about the sort of work he has to do] *Pretty much the same sort of work as GCSE sort of thing.* [Nov, 2013]

[talking about the teaching style in his lessons] *Just the same sort of teaching style really [as GCSE]. Like maybe writing on the board, showing up something on the board that we can put down in our books sort of thing.* [Nov, 2013]

After his disappointment in his results, Owen makes no mention of discussing this with his parents or any of his teachers.

Yeah, I'm just able to focus I've just accepted this [not getting onto Level 3 courses] is what has happened so I need to do this. [Apr, 2014]

This too could have had a negative effect on Owen's self-efficacy, as without any additional support, he was unlikely to be able to feel positive about his abilities and move forward. Low self-efficacy means students are less likely to develop effective learning strategies, or be able to self-monitor effectively. Lower self-efficacy may have impeded Owen's persistence, skill acquisition, ability to study effectively and ultimately undermined his achievement. His ability to motivate himself to alter his learning patterns or behaviours may have also be thwarted by his lack of clear goal setting. His only goal was to complete the Level 2 courses to then study A Levels. He had in no way elicited how he might achieve that. He had no specific proximal goals and as such, the rather generic and far-off goal of passing the Level 2 courses to stay on were perhaps too vague to be useful. They offered no proximal points in order for him to self-assess against or to measure success. As such he was not able to create self-motivating opportunities for specific courses of action. Not having these was likely to lead to a drop in performance that would potentially lead to a decrease in motivation. Perhaps a lack of feedback about his progress could be an issue. Without proof he was moving forwards, it was unlikely that Owen would be able to maintain self-efficacy. The fact that he was on Level 2 courses was a very clear reminder that he had made no progress in relation to his own learning. This could have undermined his motivation to work on tasks and attempt to become more skilful.

There was no demand for Owen to try to excel or develop more outward looking goals. All he needed to do was to pass an additional two GCSE equivalent courses in order to be able to

take his A Levels the following year. These goals did not relate to leaving school, but instead remaining there for another two years. This sort of continuity and lack of challenge has meant that for Owen there was little to discuss about his transition, as the changes he had experienced were in fact minor.

5.11 Themes from the snapshot data

As well as considering the themes identified within the interview data, I also wanted to consider the themes identified in the snapshot data. This information was analysed in the same way as the interview data, with units of meaning identified and then grouped into themes where appropriate. The most common themes occurring in the snapshot data are summarised below.

5.11.1 Teachers expect students to take control of their own learning

This was the most common feature of transition identified in the snapshot data. 77% of all of the students identified the fact that they had a much greater responsibility for their learning in the sixth form than they did in year 11. For some this meant that they felt they had greater responsibilities outside of lessons to prepare and research. For others it was being trusted to complete the necessary work, even when a teacher was absent or to be responsible for the meeting of deadlines instead of relying on teachers to remind them.

I would say the only really big change for me has been an increased amount of independence and responsibility for my own learning.

The main difference between year 11 and sixth form is that you have more responsibilities to do work outside of lessons and meet deadlines of work as it is more individual learning and doing more work yourself than in a class and you need to be on top of work because you will be needed to complete more homework and individual learning yourself.

The biggest change that happens when moving into sixth form is the amount of control you're suddenly given over your education/learning, and how unprepared you realise you are.

5.11.2 Increased workload

Many students in the snapshot data spoke about the level of work they were expected to do. This element of their transition experience was identified by 53% of the students. Many had underestimated how much more they would be required to do; despite realising that the sixth form would be more demanding than year 11. Some students identified the fact that year 11 did not prepare them for the workload they would encounter in the sixth form. In a small number of examples, the increase in workload was compounded by the level of academic challenge and the fact teachers expected them to complete this work independently. Many spoke of the time it had taken them to adjust and get used to this element of the sixth form.

Transition into the sixth form has been different to how I thought, I thought the main change would be the difficulty of lessons but it is really the workload.

The transition has been difficult for me. I have been slapped in the face by the workload and it is taking me a while to acclimatise.

So much more work has to be done outside of lessons it can feel quite suffocating if you aren't on top of it.

5.11.3 Better relationships with peers and teachers

For many students a very positive element of their transition was the improvement in relationships between both their teachers and peers. Many referred to the fact they felt their teachers knew them better and treated them in a more adult way. In some cases this was bound up with the increased freedom and responsibility they felt they had in the sixth form. As well as improved relationships with their teachers, many students felt that their peer

relationships were much better too. Some referred to a reduction in bullying and others the opportunity to make new friends and get to know people they did not know previously. The improvement in relationships with people around them was cited by 36% of the students.

Smaller year group, get to know a lot more about people you haven't really spoken to before.

I haven't got bullied as much as I did in Year 11.

We are treated more as equals by teachers and staff, which gives a different feel to learning.

5.11.4 Enjoyment of courses

27% of the students spoke positively about the fact that in the sixth form they only had to work on the subjects they enjoyed. For some this helped their motivation to cope with the additional workload. For others it had reduced the pressure on them because their focus was spread across fewer subject areas. In some cases, the enjoyment was based on the fact they were getting to study subjects they did not have access to at GCSE.

The positives of being in sixth form is that you can now focus on your desired subjects.

It's been quite easy to get used to the extra work load and is enjoyable as I'm doing the subjects that I enjoy.

I can focus more because I chose to be in that certain subject. The freedom and not having to worry about seven different subjects. Now I only have to focus on four.

5.11.5 Moving into the sixth form was a significant change

A number of students (24%) talked about the significant change they had experienced as they made the transition from year 11 to the sixth form. For most, they found the move to sixth form challenging, simply because it was in such strong contrast to what they had experienced previously. Some referred to the first few weeks and how intense they found the lessons and how much what was expected of them by their teachers had changed. In some cases, students were also getting used to new teachers, subjects and classmates, with very little prior experience to support them.

I feel that during the first two weeks of sixth form, the lessons were quite full on and there wasn't time to settle into the sixth form.

The transition into sixth form was quite difficult to start with as it was a big change from year 11. The subjects were new, the teachers were new and so were the people in the classes.

The transition into the sixth form has been challenging it is so different compared to year 11.

5.11.6 Increased level of academic challenge

20% of the students identified the increased level of academic challenge as a significant element of their transition into the sixth form. Many referred to the fact that teachers expected them to know a lot more and be able to apply what they knew from their studies at GCSE. Some cited the fact that the standard of work they were used to, which would have allowed them to achieve a C at GCSE, would now only allow them to achieve an E at A Level.

The difficult part is trying to do A Level work and get a high grade, as the high GCSE grades are low A Level. The work is more challenging.

We are expected to know everything from GCSE – should have revised that in the summer.

The new subjects I took are challenging and the different structures of writing are hard to get used to.

Having identified themes for each of the students who took part in the interviews and those who shared their thoughts *via* the snapshots, it was now possible to identify if any of these resonated for groups of students. These shared experiences are considered in the following discussion, where each is considered and illuminated with relevant literature.

6. Discussion of shared experiences

In this chapter, I intend to consider the experiences that were shared by the students as they made the transition into the sixth form. Recognising the similarities between the experiences develops an understanding of the process of transition into the sixth form, as well as how students cope and may need support.

6.1 The identification of shared themes

Table 6.1 shows all of the themes identified in the analysis of the students' experiences of transition. Any theme is listed in this table if it affected more than one student. The remaining themes that were only identified on an individual basis are listed below with the name of the student it affected. The themes that affected the most students appear at the top of the table and those that affected least at the bottom. The heavy line shows the point below which the theme affected fewer than half of the students interviewed. Where the themes from the snapshot data and interview data correspond, these are highlighted in grey.

Identified themes, which only affected individual students:

- increased pressure to perform in exams (Anna)
- perceived lack of teacher support (Harry – Transition experience 1)
- negative peer comparisons (Harry – Transition experience 1)
- positive peer comparisons (Harry – Transition experience 2)
- experience from year 11 (Liz)
- low teacher expectations (Owen)
- low level of challenge (Owen)
- few changes to teaching and learning (Owen).

Identified themes	Anna	Ben	Charlie	Claire	Emily	Harry	James	Liz	Nancy	Owen
Teachers expect students to take control of their own learning	X	X	X		X		X		X	
Increased workload	X		X	X	X			X	X	
Opportunities to self-regulate learning	X	X			X		X		X	
New strategies to manage workload	X			X	X			X	X	
Increased levels of teacher support				X			X	X	X	
Improved self-efficacy		X			X	X	X			
Clear proximal goals		X		X			X			
Low levels of motivation			X			X				X
No clear proximal goals			X	X						X
Poor self-efficacy			X		X	X				
Increased motivation		X				X	X			
Increased level of academic challenge	X							X		

Table 6.1: Identified themes that were experienced by more than one student

A full discussion of all of the shared themes falls outside the scope of this work. Therefore, a decision had to be made about which of the themes were significant enough to warrant inclusion in the following section. The first consideration was the number of students a theme affected. For larger IPA studies like mine, *'measuring recurrence across cases is important'* (Smith *et al.*, 2009, p. 106). In my study, I decided that a recurrent or shared theme was one that affected half or more of the participants. Recurrence was an important consideration for me in the identification of the final shared themes. I wanted to consider those themes that affected a wide range of students. The reason for this is that schools are resource and time poor. By identifying and better understanding themes that affect a range of students, any interventions schools might wish to put into place as a result are likely to reach a large number of them.

Recurrence though was not the sole way in which shared themes were identified. In addition to the number of students each theme affected, the richness of each theme was also considered. For each theme, the superordinate themes were tabulated with all of their accompanying subthemes. An example of this for one of the superordinate themes is shown in Table 6.2 and the complete table of all shared superordinate themes is shown in Appendix 9.5. By carefully looking at the subthemes I was able to identify which super-ordinate themes were supported by the richest data. This is important for a phenomenological study as the aim is to develop an analysis which allows us to *'see patterns across case studies while still recognising the particularities of the individual lives from which those patterns emerge'* (Smith, 1999, p. 424). To maintain the focus on idiography, it was essential that the identified shared themes were supported by sufficiently thick descriptions that we could still see how the individual experiences contributed to larger scale patterns of experience. I was also aware that some of the super-ordinate themes identified were reflected in the sub-themes of other super-ordinate themes. For example, the super-ordinate theme 'Increased motivation' appeared as a sub-theme in 'Opportunities to self-regulate' and the super-ordinate theme 'Clear proximal goals' was reflected as a sub-theme in 'Opportunities to self-regulate' and 'Improved self-efficacy'. In fact all of the super-ordinate themes below the heavy line in the table are reflected in those above, either as a counterpoint, e.g. 'Poor self-efficacy' compared to 'Improved self-efficacy', or were a sub-theme in those above the heavy line. This further reinforced the richness of the first six super-ordinate themes and supported their selection as those which best represent a shared experience of transition for this group of students. The final six super-ordinate themes are shown below:

- teachers expect students to take control of their own learning
- increased workload
- opportunities to self-regulate learning
- new strategies to manage workload
- increased levels of teacher support
- improved self-efficacy.

What follows is a discussion of each of these shared experiences of transition. Whilst they have been separated here for ease, it is important to realise that each of the themes impacted on, and related to others. As such, I have felt it more useful to discuss the shared themes in an order that demonstrates more clearly the way they relate to one another, rather than simply the order they appear in Table 6.1. The order in which the six-shared themes will be discussed is as follows: (1) teachers expect students to take control of their learning; (2) opportunities to self-regulate learning; (3) increased levels of teacher support; (4) improved self-efficacy; (5) increased workload; and (6) new strategies to manage workload.

Superordinate theme	Students contributing to this theme	Subthemes	Students contributing to this subtheme	Key quotes
Teachers expect students to take control of their own learning.	Anna Ben Charlie Emily James Nancy	Teachers take on a facilitator role.	Ben Charlie James	<i>They give you tasks to do and then you have to do them yourself. (James)</i> <i>I feel teachers just sort of treated you more like an adult and trusted you to get on with the work. (Nancy)</i>
		Being treated in a more adult way.	Anna Ben Charlie Emily James	<i>I think teachers expect a lot more of you, they expect you to be a lot more grown up straight away. (Anna)</i> <i>I think being treated more as an adult I prefer it [...] we sort of get a choice of what we're doing. (Ben)</i>
		Developing skills for life after school.	Ben Emily James Nancy	<i>You don't rely on the teachers as much, it's your own doing, which I think is better because it gets us set into the wider world. (Ben)</i> <i>I think you need that independence, especially if you want to go to uni and stuff if you have no independence in sixth form then it's going to be a complete change in lifestyle and shock. (Nancy)</i>
		Students have greater responsibility.	Anna Ben Charlie Emily Nancy	<i>It was my choice to do what I wanted to do, it was my choice why I wanted to come here. (Ben)</i> <i>You're in kind of charge if your work, so you don't get told to do this, it's you're kind of in control. (Charlie)</i> <i>You're not relying on the teacher anymore and you've got to start sorting everything out. (Emily)</i>

Table 6.2: One of the identified superordinate themes and its related subthemes

6.2 Teachers expect students to take control of their own learning

This was the element of the transition experienced by the greatest number of the students interviewed. For some the change in teacher expectation was a pleasant change and for others a significant cause for concern. Those that felt positively, saw the change in teacher expectations as a direct result of being treated in a more adult and responsible way. For many of them this reinforced that they were in control and that their teachers would provide what they needed to be successful, but the degree to which they engaged with this was very much up to them. This seemed to be in direct opposition of their reported experiences in year 11 where their narratives suggested that teachers took control of the learning.

To understand why this was such a significant element for so many students, it is useful to consider the roles of relevant motivational concepts that help to explain why shifting teacher expectations had such a significant effect. Self-determination theory (SDT) seems to have particular resonance with the narratives of the students who experienced this theme. SDT is a theory of human motivation that considers factors that may enhance or impede growth-orientated processes in people (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

SDT explains how people's intrinsic motivation is sustained by having the need for autonomy and competence fulfilled. In the case of the students in this study, they could be said to be autonomous because they were spending time on their studies willingly and, in many cases, actively choosing to give up other activities to complete their schoolwork. Their competency was developing as they overcame the challenges they faced as they moved into the sixth form (Niemic & Ryan, 2009).

In addition to intrinsic motivation, SDT also considers the role of extrinsic motivation, which for most of the students participating in this study was the achievement of the skills and qualifications necessary to progress to their chosen destination after school. Within SDT, four types of extrinsic motivation are identified, each varying in terms of how autonomous students are and how much control the teacher exerts in the classroom. The most autonomous of these is *integrated regulation* and the least is *external regulation* (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). External regulation involves behaving in a certain way simply to avoid punishment or get some sort of reward. For example, a student will study for an exam simply to get a good grade, but once the exam is complete, they are unlikely to carry on studying. As the level of

autonomy increases, the behaviours people engage in occur because they are considered valuable or important. For example, James was completing his Level 2 courses so that he could progress to his film course at college. Ben was studying his A Levels so he could read history at university and then complete his PGCE. As these behaviours are self-generated, they increase a person's sense of autonomy and lead to integrated regulation (Niemic & Ryan, 2009; Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

The fact that teachers in the sixth form expected students to take greater control of their own learning appeared to enhance their feelings of autonomy (Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio & Turner, 2004). Teachers were much more likely to take on a facilitating role in the classroom, which meant that the students had to choose how they approached tasks and whom they worked with to do so. This meant that teachers in the sixth form were creating autonomy supportive environments which enhanced student intrinsic motivation (Niemic & Ryan, 2009; Stefanou et al., 2004; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). As teachers also took the view that work completion was much more at the discretion of the students, the levels of coercion and therefore external regulation of student's decreased (Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

... now we realise we're more adult and it's not just the teachers telling us what to do now it's us trying to make the most of ourselves in a way. 'Cos now we've got to think right, if I want to do this, I've got to do this and this, instead of the teacher going you're doing that, you've got to do this. So there's sort of like, when we do our outside learning, learning outside of the classroom we've got to think right, what do we want to do, what do we want to come out of this, rather than going, oh this is what we're going to do, this is what the outcome has to be. So I think it's more we have the choice of what we want to do and how you want to put it across to others. I think that's what mainly has switched me on as myself. [Ben, Nov 2013]

It would seem therefore that the expectations of teachers in the sixth form and the structure of lessons clearly influenced the levels of autonomy experienced by students. However, there were influences on student competence too. The increased level of academic challenge experienced by students as they came into the sixth form forced them to reassess and develop their capabilities (Niemic & Ryan, 2009; Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006). In order to support

this, students were clear that they felt their teachers were willing to help and gave them useful feedback. As a result, many of the students felt more efficacious and therefore competent.

Teacher support seemed to have been a fundamental element for many of the students as they transitioned into the sixth form. Although this will be discussed in more detail in section 6.6, it has relevance here too. SDT explains the need to feel related to those around us. In the sixth form, students talked about how they felt surrounded by peers who were similarly motivated to themselves, but also how much more closely related they felt to their teachers (Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006; Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

Well they [the teachers] know that you are committed to that subject, that you only chose four and one of those four is their subject. So they know you care about it as much if not more than they do. So I think they are more willing to give up their time because they feel it will be well spent in the long run, and it will be helpful.

[Harry, Jan 2015]

The students seemed to feel that their teachers genuinely cared about them and respected them. This is significant as people who experience high levels of relatedness are much more likely to show integrated regulation. Having this sort of motivation was important for these students as their teachers relinquished more control and responsibility for their education over to them. Without integrated regulation, it is very hard to persist at academic tasks that can be difficult or boring (Niemic & Ryan, 2009).

... the teachers are always there to help you and you can always rely on them to help you 'cos that's what they're there for. [James, Apr, 2014]

The mode of teaching experienced by students in the sixth form reinforced the expectation that they were much more responsible for their own learning. Much more in lessons students referred to teachers in a facilitator type role where they expected them to contribute actively. For example, carrying out particular tasks in order to prepare for lessons or activities to consolidate learning. No longer was this something done for or with students. Having the opportunity to be increasingly independent and develop study skills was seen by many of the students to be important for future jobs and study at university. As such, many more of

students' goals become mastery-type goals that enhanced their motivation by helping them to feel autonomous (Stefanou et al., 2004; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Ames, 1992).

Clearly, they felt these skills were valuable and so they engaged with them in a way that they did not do in year 11. Perhaps in year 11 these future events were too distant to be motivational and there were insufficient opportunities for them to work independently. The control exerted by teachers was too great for them to feel autonomous and therefore willing to fully engage (Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006; Stefanou et al., 2004; Husman & Lens, 1999; Skinner & Belmont, 1993)

Although mastery goals are from a different field of motivational theory than SDT, the two are not incompatible, and both are likely to have an effect on students due to the structures and expectations of the sixth form. Learning environments that develop structures for mastery goals include the following elements:

- giving students appropriately challenging and meaningful work
- evaluating the students in a way which emphasises development of skills rather than comparison with peers
- giving students more choice and autonomy (Ames, 1992).

All of these opportunities exist for students in the sixth form – their courses offer many of them significant challenge, but with teacher support they feel equipped to tackle these. They get detailed, personal feedback, which is related to the progress in their learning and they have much greater autonomy. Clearly, SDT and mastery goals overlap in that they both influence intrinsic motivation and feelings of autonomy.

I feel like I'm ... at GCSE I felt like I couldn't really work much harder, now at A Level I feel that I am definitely working harder and I feel although there are less subjects because there is so much content I feel a bit more responsible myself to do well because, erm, you're not having loads of teachers all around you trying to get various subjects done, it's all like, it's very focused on what you want to do and because a lot of the teachers say if you don't do your HMWK that's your choice, that's 'cos, it's up to us to pass and stuff like that and again, I think that's independent and I do like that actually because ... although there's pressure to pass, you're not having loads of

pressure from your teachers which is definitely something that happens at GCSE. [Liz, Jan 2015]

The fact that once in the sixth form students were willing to engage in this new, more independent way was probably because they felt sufficiently supported to do so. Often the students referred to being able to ask for help if they needed it. Clearly, they felt that should they struggle with this new responsibility there was access to help (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). This was probably also supported by the very strong elements highlighted in the snap shot data that teachers were more relaxed and spoke to students in a much more adult way. As such, it would seem that teachers appeared to students to be much more accessible and available and so students felt better supported to take educational risks and work in new and unfamiliar ways (Niemic & Ryan, 2009).

I think it's more the fact that opposed to the teachers feeding you the information you've actually got more of an active role in your workload and what you are doing, you're not just relying on the teacher anymore and you've got to start sorting everything out. [Emily, Apr 2014]

As well as teacher support, there were clear structural elements of teaching and learning in the sixth form that reinforced the expectation that students were much more in control of their own learning. Many students referred to free periods as an opportunity to direct their own learning and carry out the tasks that they needed to do. By having these opportunities there was a very clear message that it was up to students to plan and make the most of this time (Zimmerman, 1989). The fact that they were given free time in the school day also showed students that independent study was a valuable and intrinsic part of their learning experience in the sixth form. Both the structures in place in the sixth form and teacher expectations reinforced the need for students to take control of their own learning.

For other students the loss of teacher control was a significant source of anxiety. Those who had the greatest problem with this were some of the most successful at GCSE. Both Anna and Emily felt vulnerable without the clear teacher guidance they were used to in year 11 (Bandura, 1993; Skinner et al., 1990). Both struggled with understanding what was sufficient and how much work outside of class was reasonable. Both seemed driven by the fact that with less teacher direction, they were much more responsible for their learning and had

significant concerns that they might miss something. As such, both dedicated significant amounts of time outside of class to extra study. Eventually, Anna and Emily learnt to deal with the loss of teacher control, but in both cases this required teacher intervention (Niemi & Ryan, 2009). In Anna's case, this meant beginning to use the strategies suggested by her teachers at the beginning of her courses. For Emily, her teachers gave voice to the fact that the strategies she was employing were ineffective and that she needed to think about more productive ways of working.

... it's the [time] management mainly, because it's just erm, like going over notes at home, erm, and doing the homework as well. Like you never know if the homework that you are given is enough to erm count for independent study or if you've gotta like do the notes as well. [Anna, Nov 2013]

I didn't feel that I was working enough, I wasn't putting enough hours in and that I was up until midnight trying to fit it all in and I still wasn't finishing work and had to do it the next day. I felt like I was doing something wrong. [Emily, Apr 2014]

Without question, the shift in teacher expectations and the growing demand to direct their own learning was for the majority of the students the defining element of their transition into the sixth form. Despite initial difficulties getting used to this, the opportunity to feel like they were being treated in a more adult way and have control of their own learning was a source of great pleasure for most and the element that they enjoyed the most about their transition into the sixth form.

6.3 Opportunities to self-regulate

For many students this was a significant element of their transition experience, as often the sixth form was the first time that they had sufficient opportunities to regulate their own learning. There were many ways that the teaching and learning in the sixth form provided the opportunities for and encouraged self-regulated learning (SRL).

'Self-regulation refers to the self-generated thoughts and feelings and behaviours that are oriented to attaining goals. These learners are proactive in their efforts to learn because they are aware of their strengths and limitations and because they are guided by personally set goals and task-related strategies.' (Zimmerman, 2002, p. 65–66)

Self-regulated learners are proactive and view their academic development as something that is within their control for which they take responsibility (Zimmerman, 1990). In order to take control of their learning, self-regulated learners engage in a range of tasks that allows them to see progress in their own development. This includes setting goals, planning how to achieve these and then monitoring their progress towards them. As a result of this, learners who self-regulate tend to report high efficacy, high-self-attributions and levels of intrinsic interest (Zimmerman, 1989, 1990, 2002). The fact that they plan for, shape their environments and seek out advice and guidance when needed means that self-regulatory learners feel in control, knowledgeable and are decisive (Deci, *et al.*, 1991; Schunk, 1991).

I've worked out that mind maps really help me, like especially when I was revising for geography. We learn four sections and then with each of those sections Miss X and Mrs Y gave us titles and so for like a page in the revision guide I was able to do a mind map for each page which really helped me puts everything together, but I like actually. 'Cos I only did it on A4 so that I made sure that I didn't put anything on I didn't need. [Liz, Jul 2015]

The expectations placed on learners in the sixth form meant that they had no choice but to become more self-regulated. According to the participants, teachers clearly modelled to students and expected them to be engaged in the sorts of activities that were involved in self-regulation. For example, they expected students to ask for help when they needed it, or proactively find the information for themselves. They also expected students to develop their own strategies and approaches to their studies. Teachers provided monitoring and feedback, which students needed to use to inform their own progress and identify areas for development. Although teacher expectations alone will not mean that all students are going to be truly self-regulatory, for the first time students had sufficient control over their learning in order to be able to self-regulate.

Er, it's been quite significant of how you're kind of treated, how the kind of erm, what you're able to do in your spare time, you, you get spare time given to you to do extra things like er free lessons so you can do your work and extra time. But it's more erm, you're in kind of charge of your work, so you don't get told to do this, it's you're kind of in control. [Charlie, Nov 2013]

All learners to some extent use regulatory processes, but those who successfully self-regulate clearly understand the relationships between the learning strategies they are employing and how these help them to achieve the academic tasks they are working on and therefore reach their goals (Zimmerman, 1990). The key to self-regulation is the degree to which learners are able to reflect on the effectiveness of the strategies they have adopted in order to meet their learning goals. It would appear in the sixth form there were greater opportunities for students to talk to peers and teachers in order to develop their understanding of their progress and therefore the effectiveness of their learning strategies (Locke, 1996; Zimmerman, 1989). Teacher support enabled students to discuss different strategies and then get useful feedback on these. The specific and proximal nature of goals in the sixth form allowed students to engage in opportunities to understand their progress. Seeing this progress enhanced their self-efficacy and therefore their metacognitions. This not only improved their perceptions of self-efficacy but also self-control, in particular the delaying of self-gratification (Deci, *et al.*, 1991; Zimmerman, *et al.*, 1992; Schunk, 1991).

... it really is helpful to talk to teachers about how you are doing or what you can do to improve because it gives you something to aim for. [Claire, Jan 2015]

... now I know what I want to do career wise I want to stick to it and I want to do it. Knowing that playing football isn't the best choice if I can be revising. ...choosing more sensible choices is the way I've been going for it, just because I know what I want to do. [Ben, Apr 2014]

Social influences such as adult role models and verbal persuasion also help to improve self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). This ties in with closer adult relationships with teachers and also greater peer support and time to work with peers, for example in free periods. Positive self-judgement and self-reaction also support the self-regulation of learning. Self-judgement helps to inform progress and enhance self-efficacy. Self-judgement can come from the relationship

between your performance and a set of criteria, standard or goal, or from social relationships such as social norms. Both of these are supported by work in the sixth form – very clear goals and a much more focused groups of students enhancing the social norms (Zimmerman, *et al.*, 1992). Self-reaction involves discarding strategies that do not work and trying to optimise responses to challenge (Zimmerman, 1989, 2002). Bandura (1986) identified learning from your own behaviour as the most effective method for changing learners' perceptions of efficacy. The GCSEs were in effect a massive chance for this. However, learners need a certain level of self-efficacy so that if they encounter unfavourable self-evaluations they do not withdraw effort. Self-regulated learners use social support including direct help from teachers, peers or other adults as well as literary sources of information. They also understand the impact of their environment and so seek out ways to make this as helpful as possible.

I work best when I am sitting on my own, either quietly or with my music in. so being kind of isolated at the start, not knowing anyone meant I sat on my own and it meant that I worked quite well. So I got the satisfaction from working well in my lessons, and then especially last year in my frees and break and lunch I could still talk to my friends from last year, the guys I have known for a long time. [Harry, Jan 2015]

I had a really bad [GCSE] results day and it kind of changed from there really. I talked to my parents about everything and it kind of changed for me. I started to knuckle down more and feeling good about getting good results. [James, Nov 2013]

As well as being encouraged to begin to self-regulate due to the expectations imposed on them, for many students their self-regulation was enhanced by the fact they often had very clear goals for after the sixth form (Husman & Lens, 1999). In many cases, this was a new way to think about their studies. Previously, many will have simply wanted to 'do well'. Now, students had specific goals that required specific levels of achievement. This meant that students had much clearer outcomes against which to monitor their progress. With clear outcomes, they had much more accurate ways to establish if they were making sufficient progress, and if not, had the opportunity to seek out advice or information to improve their performance (Locke, 1996; Schunk, 1991). Unlike year 11, in the sixth form, students rapidly developed clear academic goals, rather than the general 'I want to do well'. By the Christmas of year 12, most are actively considering further education or job opportunities and are beginning to identify the grades they need to achieve. Such clear outcomes meant that

students were much more likely to be able to engage in self-regulatory behaviours as they had distinct actions and processes they needed to pursue in order to acquire the information or skills they needed. More than ever, their studies had high levels of instrumentality, all of which meant students had opportunities to self-regulate (Deci, *et al.*, 1991).

I feel more independent and more responsible because as I've chosen what I want to do, I'm almost specialising, I feel, not that they're more important than GCSE, 'cos it's your specific subjects that you want to do, there's a slight hint of independence with like it carries on and affects university and the rest of your life that's I think the independence and responsibility side. [Liz, Jan 2015]

As well as the increased perceived instrumentality of their courses and teacher expectations, which provide opportunities to self-regulate, there were also structural elements of the sixth form that encouraged this too. One characteristic of self-regulated learners is that they are able to structure and create learning environments that optimise their performance. Students place value on tasks that meet their needs. Wigfield and Eccles (1992), identified four task values that affect students' achievement behaviour: attainment value, the importance of doing well on a task; intrinsic value, the enjoyment from engaging in the activity or the inherent interest in it; utility value, how the task relates to future goals and finally cost, the negative aspects of engaging in a task. In year 11, there were very few opportunities for students to choose the tasks they engaged in and so these often failed to meet their needs or be assigned any great value by them. Instead, teachers controlled classes and learning activities in lessons and even the tasks set for students to pursue outside of lessons were heavily structured and guided by teachers. Free periods in the sixth form and more flexible lessons where students were expected to work independently provided specific opportunities for them to be able to control their learning environments.

... you're given free periods to do what you please and it's your responsibility what to do. So you could do work or you could go out or something. That gives you your choice and that's what you kind of need later in life to have your own responsibilities.

[James, Nov 2013]

The opportunities for self-regulation students had in the sixth form come through clearly in the language of the interviews: '*I manage my own time*', '*I plan and prioritise*', '*I ask for*

help, *'I have clear goals'*, *'I worked out new strategies'*, *'I choose to study because it is important'*. For many students the opportunity to self-regulate was significant. Although they do not refer to it explicitly, the skills they felt they were developing as a result of the opportunities to become more self-regulatory were seen as life-long skills that would help them to be independent and successful as they moved on after the sixth form.

6.4 Increased teacher support

A significant factor in students' ability to self-regulate and take on increased responsibility for their own education lay with the fact they felt supported by their teachers. Both the interviewees and the students who engaged in the snapshots, identified increased teacher support as a significant element of their transition. For students like James, there was a fundamental shift in his relationship with his teachers so that he felt truly supported.

Increased teacher support encourages a greater sense of relatedness. Relatedness is one of the key elements of SDT and when people feel this, it provides them with a means of support when they are challenged and often promotes a sense of self-reliance and tenacity (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Relatedness is supported by the quality of student–teacher relationships. Clearly, students felt their relationships with teachers in the sixth form were much better than those they experienced in year 11. With smaller class sizes, students felt teachers were more accessible, had more time to spend with them and that interactions they had were of high quality. These things helped students to feel that their relationships with teachers were closer, which was supported by a more informal tone so that they feel teachers were more approachable.

... you can like talk to them [teachers] more as a, not as a friend, but more as a like associate more than a teacher. [James, Nov 2013]

Erm, I think in the sixth form you have a lot more contact with teachers, you can go and see them more or email them more. It feels more comfortable like talking to teachers and asking for help. You have like a closer relationship with them. [Claire, Jan 2015]

Students in the sixth form were also likely to be more engaged than perhaps those in year 11. They had chosen to stay in this form of education and have selected courses they are interested in and that hold a key place in helping them to secure a particular path or destination on leaving school (Deci, *et al.*, 1991). It would seem that relatedness and engagement could create a positive spiral effect. Students who are more engaged elicit more supportive reactions from others, including motivational support from teachers (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). People that feel related to others and supported are likely to feel more engaged, creating positive behaviours such as persistence, effort and enthusiasm (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

... you are choosing your own subjects and I don't know, the people there, most of them actually want to be here and the lessons are less disrupted and I think that is different and I think that's why it [the sixth form] feels so different. [Emily, Apr 2014]

There were a number of reasons cited for feeling like there was better teacher support in the sixth form. The first was that for most of the students, class sizes were smaller than they had previously experienced. This meant that there was simply more teacher access. Teachers had fewer students to deal with so they were available more quickly and had more time to spend with individuals. Potentially because classes were smaller, teachers were more likely to know the individual progress students were making in more detail than when dealing with larger classes. In this way, they were much more able to give specific and relevant support, which then reinforced the usefulness of turning to teachers when needed.

I'd say that they're [teachers] more kind of relaxed and you can do work easier and that year 11 there was more disruption in lessons because there are more people in large classes. In sixth form, there are less people and less disruption and lessons move more smoothly than before. [Charlie, Apr 2014]

Students also felt teachers were more accessible outside of lessons too. This may be a situation perpetuated by the expectations of students in the sixth form. As students took greater control of their learning they needed more guidance as this was something they had not been required to do previously. Since their studies often had significant implications for their future goals, students were more invested and therefore more motivated to seek out teacher support. Equally, many students felt that teachers were more willing to give up their

time to help – some citing shared enjoyment of the subject with their teachers and the fact that teachers recognised students' commitment to the subject.

Well they know that you are committed to that subject, that you only chose four and one of those four is their subject. So they know you care about it as much if not more than they do. So I think they are more willing to give up their time because they feel it will be well spent in the long run, and it will be helpful. [Harry, Jan 2015]

The fact that in the sixth form teachers were much more involved with their students, and actively demonstrated this by being more open and approachable, sharing the enjoyment of their subject with students and being generous with personal resources like time and attention all significantly increased students sense of relatedness. This meant that there was the opportunity for students to build a reciprocal relationship with teachers, who they felt shared similar values and as such experienced a greater sense of relatedness.

6.5 Improved self-efficacy

Many of the students interviewed reported feeling successful and able to cope with the demands in the sixth form. This was often despite challenges in the early stages of transition. It would appear that for many of the students interviewed, the sixth form has provided greater opportunities for them to develop their self-efficacy when compared to year 11.

Bandura (1982) proposed that self-efficacy plays a central role in human agency. Self-efficacy allow us to understand and explain a wide variety of behavioural patterns, thought patterns and levels of emotional arousal. During transition, students clearly found the adjustment to their new academic climate challenging (Galton, 2003; Anderman & Maehr, 1994).

I think it was quite a big leap, like the pressure and all the HMWK is quite different to year 11. Yeah just a lot more detailed HMWK that you have to spend a lot more time on. [Nancy, Jan 2015]

It was hard at first, it was a big change it took me quite a while to get used to it. It was a big shock, like whoa, I have all of this work and I have to do this by myself in my own time. It was good for me to tell myself like right you need to crack on now, you need to work. You couldn't be messing around like in the lower years. So it was quite a shock and it was quite hard, but as you get used to it and move on more it gets easier and you get used to it. [James, Apr 2014]

Understanding the role self-efficacy plays in task-related performance helps us to understand how and why the students adjusted and learnt new strategies to help them cope. Perceived capability is the judgement an individual makes about how well they can undertake certain tasks (Bandura, 1993; Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Bandura, 1977). Due to these self-precepts of efficacy, there is a direct influence on motivation and behaviour. In order to cope with the challenges of transition and transfer, improved self-efficacy helped many of the students remain task orientated in the face of pressing situational demands and potential failures, which may have had social repercussions (Bandura, 1993). Self-efficacy also played a role in student's conception of their ability. A student's view of their self-efficacy controls the goals they set themselves, how much time and effort they are willing to put into an activity and how long they will persevere in the face of difficulty (Bandura, 1993; 1982; Bandura & Schunk, 1981). This had implications for some of the students as they got used to the new social comparison with peers and the impact this had on their self-efficacy. In many cases, teacher support made students feel like this was a process in which they could engage and therefore improve. In most cases this fostered their self-efficacy, in contrast, during Harry's first experience of transition the lack of opportunities to engage in environments where relative ability was emphasised through negative social comparison, had a significant impact on his feelings of decreasing efficacy (Bandura, 1993).

This is an important consideration as how people construe their ability has an effect on cognitive functioning. Dweck (2000) divides students into two groups depending on the way they react to challenging situations. The first group are entity theorists who view intelligence as a fixed attribute, whilst the second group, incremental theorists view intelligence as something you can develop and expand. Transition into the sixth form represents a significant challenge to the ability of students to synthesise new information, deal with greater academic demands and the changing expectations of their teachers. Students who are entity theorists are at greater risk of struggling with these new demands. They are more likely to have a helpless

response to the situation, begin to doubt their intellectual ability, become apprehensive about their studies and lag behind the performance of their peers. Entity theorists tend to use self-diagnosis in a way that will always result in a positive evaluation of personal competencies. Those with the acquirable skill view will adopt a task-diagnostic focus which aims to expand competencies and master challenges (Dweck, 2000; Bandura, 1993).

Because the sixth form requires learners to become increasingly accountable for their own progress, if students want to succeed, they had to be able to assess their own performance. When students engaged in this and saw progress, they felt better about their own ability to deal with challenge (Schunk, 1991). One very basic way that students were able to see progress was the fact that most reported that they had been able to develop strategies to deal with the increased workload. As a result, they were able to reinforce their sense of achievement and feel more self-efficacious (Zimmerman, 1990).

... at first, just before I started [the sixth form] I was thinking, oh it's going to be bad, I'm going to do this, I'm going to fail blah, blah, blah. But as I first joined I thought no, hold up I sort of like this new change I get quite used to it and still at the minute I'm happier to be here and I like the transition because it has made me more mature in a way 'cos I've been able to sort myself out and I'm more organised now.

[Ben, Apr 2014]

I still think coming up it was a bit of a shock. The workload and the expectations from year 11. But you get used to it and you take it on yourself. It's not just the teachers that expect you to do that much work, you realise you need to do that much work to get the grades that you need. [Claire, Jul 2015]

Claire's statement also brings up a key point. To feel self-efficacious, you need to see clear progress towards your goals (Zimmerman, 2002; Bandura, 1997). Unlike in year 11 where student goals tended to be general, students in the sixth form often have very clear goals with specific levels of competency attached. For example, I want to study Psychology at Cardiff University and to do this I need an A in Psychology, a B in Sociology and a B in History. Within each of these subject targets, students will know very specifically what they need to do to achieve these grades. As a result of very clear proximal goals, students have increased opportunities to self-monitor (Husman & Lens, 1999; Locke, 1996). With increased

opportunities to review their learning, students are much more likely to see progress and so feel efficacious (Bandura, 1986).

Self-efficacy in the sixth form may also be improved because of the increased access they have to teacher support. Bandura (1986) identified the importance of social influences on self-efficacy. Exposure to adult modelling and verbal persuasion can increase feelings of self-efficacy. James is a good example of where this has happened. In the sixth form, James has had significantly increased contact with his teachers. He has been able to discuss with them areas he has struggled with and has had access to one-to-one mentoring. Clearly, this has helped him to access his courses and build his subject knowledge. In addition to this, his teachers have helped to model new strategies and when he has succeeded, have offered praise. All of these things have meant that James has felt more self-efficacious.

Once again, the structural elements of the sixth form and the expectations placed on students have a significant effect. Increased self-efficacy appears strongly influenced by the fact that in the sixth form students have clear, proximal goals that have high levels of instrumentality (Zimmerman, 2002; Locke, 1996; Zimmerman, 1990). For most students the only reason they will have stayed in the sixth form is to achieve a certain qualification or prove a certain level of competence in order to move onto new opportunities after school. As such, students will have opportunities to assess their progress in ways that perhaps were not as clear in year 11. Alongside clear proximal goals, students have access to teachers and peers who model strategies, and provide feedback and offer positive social influences (Elliot & Dweck, 2007; Zimmerman, 2002, 1989). This means that in the sixth form there are more opportunities for students to have experiences to enhance their perceived self-efficacy.

6.6 Increased workload

This was a significant factor for many of the students interviewed and it came up in many of the snapshot responses. In fact, over half of the students in the snapshot data cited increased workload as a key element of their experience of transition.

Workload is a very difficult thing to measure as it is shaped not only by the number of hours spent on tasks (the objective workload), but also the perception of the amount of work being done (the subjective workload) (Kyndt, Berghmans, Dochy & Bulckens, 2014). Students' perceptions of their workload can be shaped by many factors, for example the relation to examination pressure, how tired they are and how meaningful they believe the tasks to be. A perceived heavy workload is therefore often something that develops as a result of stress (Kember, 2004). A heavy workload can be disruptive as it tends to result in students engaging in surface learning in a bid to complete the work as quickly as possible (Baeten, Kyndt, Struyven & Dochy, 2010). As they develop new relationships with peers and teachers, they effectively create a support mechanism, and improve morale, both of which reduces stress and therefore their perception of workload (Kember, 2004; Chambers, 1992). This may explain why, for most students, their feelings of being overburdened by work diminish over time.

I would say honestly like, as a whole it is quite an easy transition. Because, you spend, you see your friends a lot more because you have frees and stuff, and so while it might be quite a jarring transition, you've got people with you who are going through the same thing. So normally, people just talk to them about it and its fine. [Harry, Jul 2015]

However, students are willing to work long hours on activities that they feel are worthwhile and valuable (Kember, 2004). There are also factors that help students to feel less overwhelmed and therefore reduce their perceived workload. Good peer relationships and teacher relationships provide students with the opportunity to access support and help them to develop their understanding of concepts (Topping, 2005). Teaching that focuses on developing understanding and having time in the curriculum to understand the course content supports motivation and reduces perceptions of workload (Kember, 2004; Chambers, 1992). After their transition, students were faced with significant academic challenge and new ways of working. Their perception therefore at this early stage was of high workload and often feelings of being overwhelmed. As they got used to this, made use of free periods to develop their understanding and used teacher support more effectively, their perception of workload changed quite considerably. They clearly got better at planning their time and prioritising tasks, which also helped to manage feelings of stress and therefore perceived workload (van der Meer, Jansen & Torenbeek, 2010).

I still think coming up it was a bit of a shock. The workload and the expectations from year 11. But you get used to it and you take it on yourself. It's not just the teachers that expect you to do that much work, you realise you need to do that much work to get the grades that you need. [Claire, Jul 2015]

All of the students who felt that this was a significant part of their experience of transition were expecting the increase in work. However, almost none of them expected the increase to be so great. For some, the increase was something they handled with relative ease. For example Ben, who was able to quickly develop sufficient strategies to cope. For him, the increase in workload and the opportunity to develop new working practices was seen as key preparation for dealing with university and life after school.

... 'cos normally they've [the teacher] got the lesson planned out and that they tell you what to write down and how to set it out and they give you leaflets and things like that. You still get the leaflets and obviously the same structured lessons but it's more you write down notes that you're going to remember. You write down the notes that are going to help you the most and you're the one that has to bring in your books and you don't rely on the teachers as much, it's more your own doing, which I think is better because it gets us set into the wider world ready for having to get our own things ourselves. [Ben, Apr 2014]

For other students, the increased workload was associated with a great deal of anxiety. In these cases, often the anxiety was associated with a lack of preparation and ineffective strategies to deal with the workload. Students often felt ill-prepared by their experiences to date or so anxious that they might miss something that they became embroiled in the minutia and failed to develop effective processes to help them prioritise their tasks. When people feel unable to manage, they experience high levels of anxiety. The problem with this is that they begin to focus on their deficiencies rather than potential solutions. In essence, they are impairing their ability to deal with the issues by 'using up' their cognitive capacity on where they have gone wrong (Bandura, 1993). Where students dealt well with the increased workload, this was often associated with feelings of improved self-efficacy. This was unsurprising given that to deal with the amount of work, students had to be able to prioritise, review and assess their progress against deadlines. If they were successful, they saw progress

and therefore felt good about this and their ability to cope (Bandura, 1997; Locke, 1996; Zimmerman, 1990, 1989).

A lack of ability to cope in the early period of transition was common. What was interesting is that very few of the students who struggled referred to asking for direct help with this from their teachers. What they did instead was develop their own strategies, or in very extreme cases like Emily's, required teachers to actively intervene. Even in this case though, Emily did not rely on teachers to provide strategies to manage her workload, she did this herself. Students seemed to emphasise learning to deal with the workload as part of becoming more adult and dealing with issues themselves. Many of the students referred to the sixth form as somewhere to develop and practise the skills that would be needed after school, either at university or in the world of work. In essence, students were really beginning to focus on what they want to achieve and how they want to develop as adults. Erikson (1968) would argue that a failure to establish a clear identity at this stage could lead to confusion. For example, Claire, who was unsure about what she wanted to do when she left school, demonstrated this as she experienced a fall in motivation. However, once she had established a clear path for herself, and began to attend university open days, her motivation improved and she felt much more efficacious. For perhaps the first time in their academic careers students were very clear that their learning was their own responsibility and that teachers were no longer going to spoon feed them. They had made the decision to remain in the sixth form and it was their responsibility to deal with the pressures they faced, which was a key part of them preparing for adult life.

Well, I just sort of used to come in from school and get it done and out of the way. I think it's just having the motivation to do it and get good grades I suppose. But again, I think having the motivation to do it is easier when you know what you want to do, 'cos you know what you are working towards. [Claire, Jan 2015]

The increase in workload seems to be a theme that for most students was relatively short-lived. The student who struggled the most was Emily and for her this was resolved shortly after Christmas towards the end of her third month in the sixth form. The fact that students learnt to deal with the increased workload relatively quickly may be due to opportunities to regulate their own learning. Teacher advice and guidance was available, but for perhaps the first time students were able to engage in SRL because they had the opportunity to plan,

manage and review their own workloads (Zimmerman, 2002, 1990). Because of this, students were able to quickly establish strategies that worked well and reject those that did not.

Despite the early difficulties, few students felt that the increased workload was a persistent issue. As such, students were clearly able to be resilient and establish new working patterns that allowed them to cope with the additional demand. Clearly, the sixth form was creating an environment that promoted student resiliency. Certainly, it provides many of the mechanisms that promote resilience such as caring relationships, high expectations, opportunities to participate and autonomy (Morrison & Allen, 2007; Benard, 1991).

6.7 New working strategies

With the increase in workload and the clear expectation from teachers that students should be in control of their own learning, students found the sixth form much more demanding than year 11. As well as the increased amount of work, students also had to cope with increased academic rigour, which meant that they had to spend longer on tasks developing their understanding than they did at GCSE. As a result, many of the students found it necessary to develop new working strategies to cope.

Over time, the students all began to adopt their own new strategies. For most, these were adaptations of what they had been doing in year 11. For others, these were not effective and completely new strategies had to be developed. What was most interesting was that they all did this independently. None referred to being taught these by their teachers. They appeared to have developed organically and in response to their own monitoring of the effectiveness of each strategy they attempted. Clearly, the students felt sufficiently efficacious and had high perceived capabilities to be able to work in this autonomous way (Bandura, 1993; Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Bandura, 1977). In most cases, they had to work more efficiently and develop ways to make the most productive use of their time. This was helped by facilities such as free periods and having a space like the common room to use.

I've just sort of realised if you don't use your time effectively you just end up wasting time you could have spent doing things and then you're staying up late trying to get

things done at home, it has a knock on effect so when you have the time, so rather than just leaving it to the last minute. [Claire, Jul 2015]

I think having to try and keep up with the work, extra work is, has been a bit of a challenge, but, so I've had to do more at home and stuff like that but I think I'm slowly kind of getting used to it and I will eventually be fully up to date with everything and erm keep up with it. [Charlie, Nov 2013]

By developing their own working strategies, students were clearly engaging in SRL. They had been able to identify specific goals and then create working practices in order to meet these (Zimmerman, 2002, 1990, 1989). Students were taking steps to shape their learning environments, by planning, seeking help when they needed it, and then reflecting on their progress (Locke, 1996; Zimmerman, 1989). Developing new strategies seemed to have been imperative for those who discussed them. They were all clear that if they did not develop strategies to cope then teachers would not do this for them. This reinforced the sense that teachers expected students to take control of their learning and that the only person who would suffer by not engaging would be the student. Equally though, no student talked about feeling that they felt unable to do this. Given this was a new skill for which many students felt ill-prepared for, they clearly felt that the environment in the sixth form was conducive to trying new things and that teacher support would be there if they needed it (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Many students felt increased teacher support was a significant element of their transition and many others mention it in passing. As such, students may have felt more willing to try a range of strategies and test different approaches, because they knew that if they really began to struggle that there would be support that they could access and that the support will be rapid and high quality (Niemic & Ryan, 2009; Morrison & Allen, 2007; Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006; Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

It was hard moving from year 11 into the sixth form because of workload and stuff but I think the teachers made it quite achievable. I think although like the homework and stuff was quite heavy at first they sort of, I don't know like made it easy sort of thing. [Nancy, Jul 2015]

Yeah the teachers suddenly become a lot more informal very quickly. And I think that helps learning because you can be more honest with them, and they will be more honest

with you. And also teachers are far more willing to give up their time to help you.

[Harry, Jan 2015]

The only time that developing new strategies seemed to be an issue for any of the students was when the working strategies became counterproductive. This was the case with Emily. Her commitment and inability to recognise the ineffectiveness of old strategies meant that she was unable to cope with the work demands in the sixth form. It was interesting in her case that it was teacher feedback and guidance that helped her to get back on track. It was clear that Emily's teachers knew her well and identified that what she was doing was not working (Schunk, 1991). Perhaps therefore, although not mentioned explicitly, as many of the students were in smaller classes and had greater teacher access, they were more rapidly gaining specific feedback about their progress and learning, so improving their resilience and therefore encouraging them to try new strategies and take educational risks (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Morrison & Allen, 2007; Benard, 1991).

... everyone [her teachers] was saying exactly the same thing – you're capable of getting As and Bs but the only thing, the problem is you are giving yourself too much work, stressing yourself out. And when I said I was working from when I got home to about midnight everyone said you are not going to be able to sustain that. That's what made me think right ... [Emily, Apr 2014]

In year 11, I didn't really have that much support as I did now and it kind of boosted my confidence in lessons and to do my work and stuff. In year 11 I didn't have that, it was just like really, it wasn't strict, but it was like you have to do this and you do this. If you need help, just ask. But it wasn't like help, help. [The head of sixth form] would sit me down and be like how's your day, how's maths been, how's this, how's this?

[James, Nov 2013]

[talking about class sizes] *I'd say that were a bit smaller than usual, but that's I think a plus point really because you have less people to er, you've got more time the teacher can spend more time on you because there's less people around the classroom and they can get to everybody. So it just means you can kind of get more help if you need it.*

[Charlie, Nov 2013]

As such, unlike at GCSE where things may not have been noticed as quickly, students were getting information about whether the strategies they were using were successful. Because of this, they were constantly modifying and adapting what they were doing much more easily. This was also perhaps why for most dealing with the workload was not a persistent issue. The language they used in the interviews shows that they were able to adapt and work out ways to cope, for example, '*now I am able to cope*', '*it was hard to start with*'. The way in which students were able to rapidly adapt and adopt new techniques seems underpinned by frequent and accurate teacher feedback which allowed them to review, identify and refine techniques that were, or were not, working well.

Having analysed the six-shared themes experienced by the students, I have gained a great deal of insight into their experience of transition into the sixth form. This transition point has enabled the students for the first time to begin to regulate their own learning and shape their academic experiences to meet their own goals for life after school. Central to that has been the support of their teachers and how this has made them feel that they can begin to work in new and increasingly independent ways. By listening to their narratives and then engaging with the relevant literature, I have been able to develop A Level of understanding of this phenomenon that has allowed me to make relevant recommendations for practice in schools. These conclusions and recommendations follow in the next chapter.

7. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to investigate what students experienced because of transition into the sixth form. Given that this was a practice-focused EdD, I wanted to understand from the lived-experiences of the students what implications there may be for practice and how I might make recommendations for schools that would help them to support their students through the experience of transition. What follows is a summary of the student experiences and how these resonated with the wider literature on transition and transfer. Using these experiences, I have offered recommendations to schools and identified what the wider implications of this research might be. Finally, I have considered the limitations of this study and the routes future research might take.

7.1 Key findings

The findings from this research identified six-shared experiences of transition. These shared experiences were reflected in both the interview data and the snapshot data and were discussed in detail in the previous chapter. A summary of the six-shared themes: (1) teachers expect students to take control of their own learning; (2) opportunities to self-regulate; (3) increased teacher support; (4) improved self-efficacy; (5) increased workload; and (6) new working strategies, now follows.

7.1.1 Teachers expect students to take control of their own learning

The experience shared by the greatest number of students was the change in their role in their learning. In the sixth form, teachers expected them to take control and responsibility. For example in year 11, students were used to being chased for work and punished if homework was not completed. Now in the sixth form, many of the participating students described how their teachers did not follow up with work completion as closely as in year 11 and that they were expected to contribute much more to the learning in lessons by finding out information themselves, or having to bring material they had researched to their lessons. Commonly, the phrase used when discussing this element of transition were '*our choice*' and '*we had decided*

to be here'. Clearly, the students felt that their teachers expected them to become much more independent.

The change in teacher expectations were reinforced by structural elements of the sixth form too. Free periods were a novelty and they were often described as an opportunity to develop capacity and to work independently. Students also reported that teachers were much more likely to take on a facilitator role in lessons and allow them to undertake tasks on their own with support available if needed. For some of the students this independence was welcomed and seen to be very much part of their development and increasing maturity. Regularly they referred to preparing themselves for the world of work or further education by developing the skills to work independently. For others, the level of independence they experienced caused significant anxiety. They were concerned that with less teacher input, they were not sufficiently skilled to cover all of the necessary information for their examinations. The students who felt like this perhaps had experiences that were more challenging in the early stages of their transition. The anxiety they were experiencing either led to poor choices in working patterns or reduced feelings of self-efficacy.

7.1.2 Opportunities to self-regulate learning

The sixth form appears to have offered students their first genuine opportunities to begin to self-regulate. Although the students never explicitly addressed this, it was clear that the structures and norms of the sixth form helped to develop opportunities for self-regulation. For example, students had access to study spaces such as the common room, library and free classrooms that they did not have before. These structural elements of the sixth form provided them with opportunities to influence their learning environment much more than in year 11. This also was carried through into lessons. Here the students described how their teachers took on more of a facilitator role providing opportunities in lessons for them to shape their learning environment and make decisions about the way they approached learning tasks: *'you just kind of, er, just given choices of how to kind of do things'*. As well as offering greater choice in lessons, teacher behaviour also encouraged other elements of self-regulation in the students. For example, some described how they were expected to seek out help when it was needed, or to be proactive and find information for themselves *'if you don't understand*

something you go over it at home, or you go and find a teacher'. Teachers also seemed to provide feedback to students that they found useful for informing their progress, which provided them with a way to evaluate their own self-efficacy '*it is really helpful to talk to teachers about how you are doing or what you can do to improve because it gives you something to aim for*'.

In addition to the structural opportunities and change in teacher expectations and teaching styles, for the first time many students had developed specific and time-bound goals. The university courses, further education courses and jobs students were considering after sixth form all had specific entry requirements that they had to meet. Unlike in year 11 when often students spoke about simply wanting to do well in all of their subjects, they now had very specific, measurable targets that they needed to meet. The rapidity with which they had to engage with this also brings these goals into the near future making them much more likely to improve motivation. Because of these goals, there were many opportunities for students to engage in specific tasks tailored to their needs and from which they could gather feedback about their performance. Linked to this they were much more likely when they felt they were not being successful, to seek out teacher support. All of these elements encouraged students into patterns of behaviour that were self-regulatory.

7.1.3 Increased teacher support

Many of the students interviewed and those who participated in the snapshots identified increased teacher support as an important part of their transition. Students clearly felt well supported and able to approach teachers for help if they needed it. The increased teacher support was likely to be facilitated by the fact that usually in the sixth form class sizes were smaller than in year 11. In the case of the students in this study, their classes were commonly half the size or less than their GCSE classes. This simply meant teachers had more time to spend with students and could develop a more detailed picture of each individual's abilities and areas for development in their classes. As such, their support was likely to be more targeted, in depth and specific. This was something that students valued and helped to support their self-efficacy as they had a much clearer understanding of their current attainment and rate of progress. Students also reported being treated in a more open and adult way in the

sixth form. They felt that this precipitated better relationships with teachers, which they felt enhanced relatedness and made them more willing to seek out support and guidance when needed.

7.1.4 Improved self-efficacy

Many of the students in the study reported improvements in self-efficacy. These improvements were intrinsically bound up with many of the elements already discussed as part of this summary. With the additional responsibility for their own studies, students had no choice but to begin to take closer notice of their own progress. Those who discussed this were very clear that this was not something their teachers would do for them anymore and so they had to do this. As a result, they were much more conscious of using the feedback they were gaining to identify areas where they needed to improve. By carefully monitoring their own progress, the students were much more likely to be able to identify successes and therefore develop feelings of self-efficacy. As already discussed, many of the students felt much more supported by teachers and therefore were more likely to take academic risks as they knew support was there should they need it. Because of this they were more likely to develop new skills and see more rapid progress than in lower year groups, which once again would help to support feelings of self-efficacy *‘Obviously they give you help if you need it, but it it’s erm, it’s very do it yourself now. You need your responsibility to do your own work and that is what I find different in the sixth form’*.

What sits in great contrast to all of the positive experiences of transition into the sixth form were the experiences of Owen and the first transitional experience of Harry. It would seem that for both of these students their experiences did not offer the same sorts of transformational opportunities as those experienced by others. In each case, there were barriers that prevented them accessing the sorts of benefits reported by the other students. In Owen’s case, it would appear that the structural changes and shifts in teacher expectations that precipitated the experiences and opportunities for the other students simply were not there. For him, his lessons and teacher expectations simply followed the same patterns that he had experience in year 11. As such, there were no opportunities for him to be stretched or challenged and therefore no reason to develop new skills or working relationships with

teachers. In addition, his goal was simply to ‘*do well*’ and start his Level 3 qualifications the following year. In essence, therefore, Owen’s experience was much like year 11 except that as he was doing fewer subjects. He was actually finding things easier. There were no forcers to make him change his working practices or develop any new independent skills.

For Harry many of the issues he encountered were related to motivation. During his first transition, the demands of the sixth form were simply not manageable due to a lack of interest in the subjects he was studying. Without the intrinsic interest and therefore related long-term goals, he was simply unable to motivate himself to do what was needed to cope with additional workloads. As he fell behind he was also increasingly outclassed by his peers, further undermining his motivation and feelings of self-efficacy: ‘*So even from the very start I was outmatched by everyone in the class and it only got worse from there as the year went on*’.

7.1.5 Increased workload

Closely associated with the change in teacher expectations was the increase in workload. Most of the students spoke about their expectations that the sixth form would be challenging. Many felt underprepared by the experiences they had in year 11. Clearly, they felt they had few strategies to call upon to help them to deal with the increased workload. For most, this issue receded as they got used to what was required of them. For Emily, this took much longer as she had failed to be able to develop suitable working strategies to help her to manage the additional pressures of the sixth form. It was interesting that students did not approach their teachers for help in this regard. Once again, it would appear that students felt that learning to cope with this was an important rite of passage in terms of their development and transition into their life after school. It may also be that since this was such a widely experienced element of transition that students were able to rely on each other, sharing and develop strategies in a collaborative way. When discussing free periods, the students used phrases such as: ‘*you get to work together*’, ‘*everyone at A Level is quite open*’ and ‘*so if I don’t understand some work they [peers] might be able to explain it to me*’ when describing their experience of working with peers during their free period. Certainly, free periods

seemed to have provided a space for students to work together, away from their teachers and so providing chances to share strategies and gain peer-support.

7.1.6 New working strategies

Related to both the changing expectations of their teachers and the increased workload they were encountering, many of the students developed new working strategies to help them cope. In their narratives none of the students described receiving any explicit instructions from teachers to do this, and neither did they report approaching teachers to find out what to do. Instead, they appeared to have reflected on their performance and decided they needed different approaches. For some, these approaches were adaptations of practices they had adopted in year 11. For others, they reflected a change in mind-set where they recognised that relinquishing other things, like time for social activities, was beneficial in the long term for their studies: *‘Knowing that playing football isn’t the best choice if I can be revising’*. Such decisions reflected their desire to be treated in a more adult way and that the sixth form was an opportunity to develop skills and attitudes for their lives after school. For some the development of these new skills were a simple and straightforward process that meant they were able to adapt quickly to the demands of the sixth form. For others, they took considerably longer to be able to develop strategies that enabled them to cope with the workload imposed on them. In these cases teacher intervention was required to enable them to identify the issues with their ineffective practices and develop new ones that were fit-for-purpose.

Having identified experiences of transition particular to these students and this context, it might be useful to see which of their experiences resonated with the literature on transition and transfer. For ease, I have divided the following sections into their experiences that are analogous to the literature and those that are not.

7.2 Experiences analogous with the literature

During other transitions and the move into the sixth form, it is clear that students feel that they are required to work in a more independent and self-motivated way (Heiman & Kariv, 2004; Macaro & Wingate, 2004). This is not surprising given that each transition point through the academic system marks clear changes in the development of students as they move into increasingly mature academic settings. Linked to this is often excitement about being treated in an adult way. This was clearly a feature for those students I worked with and is also shown in the earlier transition literature where working with new staff offers opportunities such as being treated in a more like a grown-up, the chance for a new start and new curriculum opportunities (Gillison, Standage & Skevington, 2008; Rudduck, Chaplain & Wallace, 1996; Lee, Harris & Dickson, 1995)

Learning to be more independent offered some of the students I worked with significant challenge. Students like Emily and Anna were able to eventually cope with this and enjoy their experience of the sixth form. For Harry and Owen, these challenges were left unresolved resulting in dropping out from year 12 and a lack of engagement, respectively. These sorts of challenges associated with transition were also reflected in the literature where it was identified that whilst transition can be an opportunity for some to re-engage, for those who do not have the appropriate skills, this can be very challenging (Chung, Elias & Schneider, 1998; Rudduck, Chaplain, *et al.*, 1996). A lack of appropriate skills was not necessarily the case for students having problems with the transition into the sixth form. None of the students coming into the sixth form felt they had been appropriately prepared by the experiences of year 11. Instead, the issues arose when they either did not have sufficient intrinsic interest and self-efficacy to sustain their motivation (Harry); or they were not exposed to the sort of opportunities to allow them to develop new strategies (Owen); or their anxiety was such that it prevented them engaging their full cognitive capacities on their academic tasks (Anna and Emily).

Despite making the transition into the sixth form in the same school that they had previously studied in, the students still had to reform self-identities like they did at earlier transition points (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Measor & Woods, 1984). In some cases, they were working with new teachers, but many of the students referred to being increasingly responsible for their own learning. In this way, despite being with teachers they knew they still had to reform

their self-identify on the basis of these new working relationships, in essence still having to engage with the sort of ‘typing’ and ‘sussing out’ you would expect during transfer from one institution to another (Nicholls & Gardner, 1999; Beynon, 1985). As well as the changing social relationships they had to navigate, students also had to develop new ways of working in this new setting (Burton & Dowling, 2005; Heiman & Kariv, 2004; Hargreaves & Galton, 2002; Delamont & Galton, 1986; Measor & Woods, 1984; Youngman, 1978). This was the same at other transition points, where students moving from one school to the next have to develop new working patterns to cope with the demands of their new school setting.

Galton, *et al.* (2003, p.6) identified a range of issues that were affecting students in their studies that could lead to a decline in progress after transition. These included:

‘... different and heightened expectations, especially in relation to working more independently; increased curricular demands leading to feelings of pressure; new and unfamiliar ways of working; a fall-off in parental involvement.’

Issues that developed, and were subsequently not addressed, could limit progress and adversely affect motivation. This certainly appeared to affect students making the transition into the sixth form. Anna certainly suffered from feelings of increased pressure and unfamiliar ways of working, as did Harry and Emily. Interestingly, perhaps what does differ is the way that these issues were addressed. In Anna’s case, she reflected on her own progress and used previous advice from teachers to help her to develop different ways of working to help her meet the increased curricular demands she was facing. In Emily’s case, teacher feedback was involved, but perhaps unlike in lower year groups where teachers would have had to help students plan a strategy; Emily was able to do this on her own. In Harry’s case too, he sought to self-help by having a final period before making the decision to re-sit year 12. Once again, in this instance, although he would have been receiving feedback from teachers about his lack of progress, he developed the strategies and decisions about how to approach this. So, although certainly the risk factors as identified by Galton, *et al.* (2003) during transfers with younger students hold true for the transition into the sixth form, the resolution of those issues when encountered in the sixth form seem to be student led, which is unlikely to be the case with younger students. This could be attributed to developmental theories that describe how at this age, students are working hard to develop their self-identity based on what they want to do as they get older. Having very clear goals in the sixth form

supported this, helping the students to maintain motivation and develop strategies to cope (Erikson, 1968). The resilience displayed by many of the students may also have been supported by structures in the environment of the sixth form, which promotes this. For example, caring relationships, the chance to be autonomous and the ability to participate (Morrison & Allen, 2007; Benard, 1991).

The way in which students viewed the challenges of moving into the sixth form also seemed to mirror findings in the literature on other school transfers. Whether or not they struggled with the changes, all of the students seemed to find the sixth form welcoming and were excited by the new routines and challenges. This is reflected in the literature which identifies that as students mature they seek opportunities to express their growing independence by engaging in new learning tasks, being treated more like an adult and becoming increasingly independent (Skinner, Furrer, Marchand & Kindermann, 2008; Zanobini & Usai, 2002; Rudolph, Lambert, Clark & Kurlakowsky, 2001; Rudduck, *et al.*, 1996; Feldlaufer, Midgley & Eccles, 1988). Despite looking forward to these opportunities some found these more challenging than others and this is reflected in the literature on earlier transfer points, for example in the work by Noyes (2006), Burton and Dowling (2005), Alspaugh (1998), Rudduck, Chaplain, *et al.* (1996) and Rickinson and Rutherford (1995). Where the opportunities to express maturity are missing, for example in the experience of transition as reported by Owen, there is the risk that students may withdraw efforts and begin to disengage, which certainly seemed to happen to him.

Other than Owen and Harry, for whom there were specific issues with their transition, the other students who struggled the most were Emily and Anna. These students reported feeling anxious about having to take responsibility for their own learning. In particular, they were concerned that they might miss something that they might rely on in their examinations. They seemed to have suffered because of perceived pressure both self-generated and from teachers. Boaler, Wilam & Brown (2000) showed that pressure from staff for students to perform might be passed onto students. This increase in pressure in the sixth form is accompanied by a significant increase in workload which can be such a burden that students eventually experience an associated drop in motivation (Rudduck, Day, *et al.*, 1996). It would appear that for Emily and Anna their high levels of anxiety meant that they were impairing their cognitive functioning which was preventing them from making progress (Bandura, 1993). With the other students, their relative lack of anxiety meant that they could focus all of their

cognitive capacity on dealing with the challenges they were facing. Anna and Emily were also experiencing an issue identified in earlier transfer points where they were having problems in subject areas they were previously comfortable with. This probably occurred due to a combination of challenges such as new teachers and expectations, heightened academic pace and more abstract subject matter (Rudduck, *et al.*, 1996). Those who also enjoyed high levels of success have to re-establish themselves in novel settings, which can increase pressure on them during transition. This may have been the case for Anna and Emily, who were both extremely successful at GCSE level and for whom transition was a very stressful experience (Measor & Woods, 1984).

All of the students expected the sixth form to be more challenging than year 11. In the face of academic challenge, students with poor self-concept may have low expectancy values for their ability to achieve in the sixth form. In earlier transfers students in this situation were identified by Pintrich and De Groot (1990) to also be at risk from not being able to self-regulate their learning. The emphasis on being more autonomous and self-directed in the sixth form can also have negative effects on self-regulation, which may cause students to be more likely to be at risk from failure (Doddington, *et al.*, 1999; Rudduck, *et al.*, 1996). This was certainly the case for students transitioning into the sixth form like Emily and Harry. For Emily, her issues with self-regulation rendered her unable to cope with the demands of her courses. In Harry's case, his inability to cope with the academic demands of his courses resulted in his decline in self-efficacy and ability to self-regulate, leading ultimately to his withdrawal from the sixth form. An inability to cope with the opportunities associated with transfer was also identified by Skinner, *et al.* (2008), Zanobini and Usai (2002), Rudolph, *et al.* (2001), Dweck (2000) and Feldlaufer, *et al.* (1988) to potentially lead to a decline in motivation and achievement, which seems to resonate strongly with Harry's first experience of transition.

Although sixth form is an opportunity for a fresh start, like at earlier transition points, there is the risk of falling back into old work patterns. Owen may be indicative of the 'non-working' group of student identified by Day (1996) who were at more risk than others of falling back into old working patterns. This was supported by Demetriou, Goalen and Rudduck (2000) who also found this group were likely to revert to old practices. Owen falls into this group because he was in a setting, which did not offer him a significant challenge. He actually said that he found the sixth form easier than year 11. Without sufficient challenge, there was no

motivation for Owen to adopt new practices, making it likely that he would therefore simply revert to old working styles.

Students with parental support found transfer less demanding than those without (Nisbet & Entwistle, 1969). This was certainly reflected in the experiences of Ben and James. They both explicitly referenced the support they enjoyed from their parents and they enjoyed perhaps the most positive experiences of transition from the students interviewed. It was likely that their parental support, the opportunities for autonomy and the close relationships they experienced with teachers would have enhanced their resilience and feelings of self-motivation, helping them to feel like they could deal effectively with any challenges they encountered (Morrison & Allen, 2007; Bandura, 1993; Benard, 1991). Along with parental support, the way in which schools prepare students for transition is also significant. The students I worked with all felt well prepared for the transition by things such as the induction days and the other information that they were provided with prior to their transition. These induction structures help to mediate some of the anxiety of transition and transfer and this was reflected in the literature about earlier transitions (Lohaus, Elben, Ball & Klein-Hessling, 2004).

Boredom also has a significant effect on motivation. This is common where teaching is encountered when students are covering work they have already done (Skinner, Furrer, Marchand & Kindermann, 2008). This may have been one of the issues for Owen for whom the experience of teaching and learning in the sixth form was almost identical to that he had experienced in year 11. This is also highlighted as an issue in earlier transfer points by Skinner, *et al.* (2008). Galton, Gray and Rudduck (1999) and Rudduck, *et al.* (1996) who also showed that in areas where there was a lack of academic challenge, students were at risk from disengaging. In Owen's case, the fact that his lessons were at the same level as year 11 and that he had fewer classes may explain why he had a more negative experience of transition in comparison with the other students interviewed.

Student's feelings of self-efficacy helped to inform their experience of transition into the sixth form. Those who had high self-efficacy, like Ben, expected to be able to take on the challenges and succeed. This was reflected by the work of Jindal-Snape and Foggie (2008) and Rudduck, Chaplain, *et al.* (1996) who saw similar patterns in students in lower year groups transferring from one school to another. It has also been shown in the literature that

those who lacked good self-efficacy or the opportunity to articulate their concerns can have issues coping and instead ‘opt out’ of the learning process (Galton, Gray & Rudduck, 2003). This may have been the case for Harry and to some degree Owen, who clearly took a very passive role in his learning in the sixth form.

All of the students interviewed, apart from Owen, found adjusting to the level of academic challenge difficult to begin with. This sort of experience is also shared by students transferring in lower year groups too (Galton, 2003; Anderman & Maehr, 1994). For those students in the study who struggled with the transition may have had issues linked with their perceived capabilities and the tasks they had to cope with. A students’ view of their self-efficacy controls the goals they set themselves, how much time and effort they are willing to put into an activity and how long they will persevere in the face of difficulty (Bandura, 1993; Bandura, 1982; Bandura & Schunk, 1981). In Emily’s case, her self-efficacy was undermined by her lack of ability to measure her progress and adjust her strategies to help her cope with the demands of the sixth form.

There are many similarities between the literature on transition and transfer with the experience of the students who participated in this study. For example, having to deal with working in new and more adult ways, being more responsible for their own learning and the role of factors such as self-efficacy and goal setting. However, I had identified in Chapter 2 areas where the extant literature and the experience of students moving into the sixth form may not match up. These differences are addressed in the following section.

7.3 Findings non-analogous with the literature

In the literature, social concerns are one of the most widely researched elements of transition and transfer. For many students this provides the source of their anxiety and is the focus for much of the research (Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan & Majeski, 2004; Pietarinen, 2000; Ward, 2000; Kvalsund, 2000; Lee, Harris & Dickson, 1995; Rickinson & Rutherford, 1995; Delamont & Galton, 1986; Gorwood, 1986; Measor & Woods, 1984; Cotterell, 1982). The social challenges students in the literature were most concerned about were linked to the possibility of losing friends; changes to discipline and authority and the prospect of being bullied.

For students who are anxious about these sorts of changes, transfer and transition is likely to be challenging. Their anxieties are often linked to disruption *via* new social groupings, increasingly more adult situations and the pressures associated with new rules and procedures (Hargreaves & Galton, 2002; Delamont & Galton, 1986; Measor & Woods, 1984; Youngman, 1978). The school-based research showed that for most students these anxieties are short-lived and long-term issues only affect a small number of students. This is mirrored in the research with higher education students:

'For some the experience will be exciting. These students will tackle the challenges thrown up by new learning and social experiences. For others, the experience will be far less enjoyable and may even be traumatic, leading to an early end to their tertiary education.' (Burton & Dowling, 2005, p.68).

These points are also supported by the work by Noyes (2006), Alspaugh (1998), Rudduck, *et al.* (1996) and Rickinson and Rutherford (1995) who all suggested that the psychological turbulence of transfer is so great that students struggle to focus on the academic and learning tasks.

Although in an integrated school based sixth form, there was still social challenge present. The students were leaving old social groupings by virtue of course selection and student destinations, encountering new staff in new settings and coping with new expectations and routines. These challenges also existed for the students in my study, but instead of being sources of anxiety, the students were overwhelmingly positive not only about the improved relationships with their teachers, but also with their peers. It was particularly noticeable in the snapshot data, for example, that a number of students referred to the fact that now they are in the sixth form they are no longer bullied. To this end, the social experience of students in this study seems to go against the traditional view of the literature on transition and transfer and instead resonate with later research, such as that by Chedzoy and Burden (2005), Lohaus, Elben, Ball and Klein-Hessling (2004) and Lucey and Reay (2000). These studies have sought to reinvestigate the issues of transfer and there have been some contradictory findings to those identified by studies such as Parker, *et al.* (2004) and Measor and Woods (1984). The later work identified either a lack of stress associated with transfer to a new school or a hopeful optimism associated with the changes. They have shown that the stress of transfer is mediated by the opportunities to develop new friendship groups, study new subjects and be

treated in a more adult way. In the work by Lohaus, *et al.* (2004), the stressful elements of transfer were also mediated by the recovery effect students experienced after the school break and the preparation for transfer carried out by the primary schools. This certainly seems to be the case in transition into the sixth form too. The students enjoy an extended summer break due to finishing their examinations before the normal school holiday. They also have a very well organised series of induction events to help to induce them into the sixth form:

[talking about when they felt settled into the sixth form] *It was where I came in, induction days; it was probably the induction days that had the most effect at the start'.*

In much of the transition and transfer literature, students are concerned by the level of academic challenge. However, although students do experience academic challenge in the transition to sixth form, the students in my study appeared to derive enjoyment from being able to learn to cope. They saw the skills required to do so as linked to future success and they were given high value as a result. The level of academic challenge is also increased by changing teacher expectations. These shift significantly in the post-16 setting with teachers expecting students to be able to self-manage their time (Dean, 1978; Roberts, 1981). In the studies by Dean (1978) and Roberts (1981) they demonstrated that students had difficulty with the difference and quality of work expected and the need to be able to complete this without significant guidance from their teachers. As well as changing expectations, academic challenge may also be increased by the way in which teachers alter their teaching style (Nicholls & Gardner, 1999). Instead of causing challenge, the students in my study described the way that they enjoyed the change in teacher expectations. They linked this to being treated more like an adult and felt that the increased level of autonomy they experienced and the skills they needed to develop to cope with this were important for their future experiences after school. Although for some like Emily and Anna, this took some time for them to adapt to, the new expectations of staff meant that they had more opportunities to develop their learning in new and interesting ways. All of the opportunities for developing their own techniques and coping with the increasing independence of the sixth form were probably seen by positive by the students in my study because they were of an age when they were trying to consider who they wanted to be as an adult (Erikson, 1968). The proximity of leaving school and having to make their way in the adult world placed this and the development of relevant skills in much greater focus for them. Most of the studies in the literature on transfer and transition are dealing with younger children, in particular those making the move to

secondary school at the age of 11. These students are at an earlier level of development who, instead of trying to develop their adult self, are more concerned with demonstrating their competency (Erikson, 1968). For them therefore, changing teacher expectations offers significant levels of challenge to their ability to appear competent and so can heighten their levels of anxiety (Nicholls & Gardner, 1999).

7.4 Implications for the school

The students talked about many positive elements of their transitional experience and these should be celebrated and maintained. Students clearly felt well supported both during and after their move into the sixth form. Students enjoyed the opportunities offered to them both academically and socially as part of their transition. They felt socially more included and enjoyed the mature way in which they were treated. They particularly enjoyed having the choice to study only the subjects they liked and having free periods to be able to keep up to date with their work.

Due to the structures and expectations of students in the sixth form, they were able to enjoy opportunities for self-regulation that in previous years were not open to them. However, this self-regulation was happening in an organic and unplanned way. As such, relative levels of success in this regard amongst students was inconsistent. Although teachers clearly expected students to be independent and self-directed, and be able to be self-regulated, they were not providing students with any explicit guidance to be able to do this. The failure to develop these skills can be damaging for students, affecting their feelings of self-efficacy and ability to fully access the curriculum. Students felt ill prepared for study in the sixth form by their experiences in year 11. It would seem useful that there should be reference to, and training on, the types of strategies students could draw upon to help them self-regulate. This could occur both in lower years and in the sixth form too. As demands on curriculum time are high, this sort of training does not need to detract from that. Introducing students to self-regulatory strategies would be best contextualised within subject teaching so that students can develop a range of relevant strategies from which they can draw upon. By offering instruction about different learning strategies in subject classes, students can be supported to see how different cognitive process, such as rehearsal or organisational strategies will help them to achieve their learning goals (Weinstein, Acee & Jung, 2011). By modelling these elements and

offering instruction, students should begin to learn the importance of learning strategies (Zimmerman & Ringle, 1981).

Many students spoke about how they knew that the sixth form would be hard, but that they underestimated this, despite warnings from teachers. Many spoke about how it would have been useful to hear from older students and to have more opportunities to speak with them about their experiences of transition. It may be that this could be built in to the existing transition arrangements. It may also be useful for students to have more opportunities to talk with existing sixth form students whilst they are still in year 11 when they are making their choices as to which subjects they wish to study. This links into the issues that Harry experienced during his first transition into the sixth form. In his case, poor subject choice had significant implications. He may have been better served by having more opportunities to discuss with existing students their experience of the subjects. There should perhaps be more-explicit guidance from the school about how best to select subjects and the demands involved in each so students can make fully informed decisions. They need to understand that the demands of the sixth form are such that they should select subjects in which they can sustain their motivation. Related to this there should be better guidance on career paths after university or further education. Students must understand how the subjects they study may lead onto further opportunities. This will in turn support their subject choices and then, hopefully, their ability to set related goals that will help them to sustain their motivation.

Goal setting clearly has a significant role in student's experience of transition into the sixth form. For those with clear goals and knowledge about how to approach these, they found the challenges associated with transition easier to manage. By having clear goals, they could identify specific instances of progress towards these and as such developed feelings of self-efficacy. Equally, when they had to make choices about the activities they should or should not engage in, clear focus on their goals made this easier for them. Once again, this benefitted only the students who had been able to do this themselves. There would therefore appear to be scope to help students to construct useful short-term and long-term goals to help them monitor their own performance. This could also be linked to subject selection for the sixth form and wider guidance about opportunities for study and further work. For example, it may be useful to provide students with periods in form time where they can meet with their tutor individually to discuss future plans. Highlighting to both students and parents access to careers guidance available online and through Local Education Authorities should also help

them to decide where their future goals might lay. Providing opportunities for students in year 11 to talk to sixth-form students who are also going through the application process to university and other further education providers would also help them to see areas that they might also be interested in exploring.

With the shift to new linear A Levels, there could be an argument for not having mock examinations in January if students are not be preparing for public examinations in the summer of year 12. However, for many of the students the mock examinations appear to play a significant role in their experience of transition. For some they mark the point at which they feel fully settled into the sixth form, for others they provided a reality check about the academic demands of the sixth form and a useful point at which they can assess their progress. As such, I would strongly recommend that the year 12 mocks remain where they are in the school calendar.

7.5 Wider implications

The experiences shared by the students in this study show the importance of teacher expectations. The contrast in the students and their engagement in their own learning between year 11 and the sixth form is stark. The main factor in controlling this was the change in teacher expectations as well as how teachers expected students in the sixth form to take more responsibility for their own learning. This shift had implications for student motivation, which meant they were more likely to take further responsibility for their work. Such positive changes in the way students engaged in their learning is desirable at any stage in a learner's development. It would seem that considering how teacher expectations inform student progress could be useful in settings other than the one investigated as part of this study.

Clearly defined goals are much easier for students to develop in the sixth form as they are actively using their studies to pursue opportunities outside of the school setting that have very clear pre-requisites. From the students I have worked with, it has been clear that this was a highly motivating element of their experience of transition. Better support for younger students in lower year groups could also help them to identify and measure progress towards clear, obtainable goals that would have similarly positive impacts on their self-efficacy too.

In order to develop clear and achievable goals, students need to have access to good careers advice and guidance. Understanding what future prospects their interests may lead to and how they can meet these will help students to develop meaningful goals towards which they can work. The power of this was seen very clearly in the students I interviewed and the difference it made to their experiences when these goals were present or not. Ben and James both had very clear goals that they were able to work towards and their progress clearly made them feel self-efficacious, which helped to grow their confidence and tackle the challenges of transition. For Harry during his first transition experience, his goals were far too distant and not related to areas of interest for him. As such, he struggled to find motivation and so did not see good progress, resulting in feelings of reduced self-efficacy, to the extent that he dropped his courses of study to restart. Claire too had difficulty motivating herself to cope with the demands of the sixth form. She was able to develop her own goals and as such was then able to see progress towards them and feel more self-efficacious with time. It is interesting to consider how the experiences of Claire and Harry may have been different if they had had more advice and guidance about how their choices in the sixth form might lead them to future prospects and what they would need to do to attain these.

Finally, the role of teachers and their relationships with students could be considered more closely. Students reported feeling much more able to talk with teachers and access help and support when they needed it in comparison with year 11. This to some extent is a circular argument as the students in the sixth form largely have much clearer, more focused goals and are as such much more engaged in their studies and therefore more proactive in seeking support. Equally, they also felt teachers were much more willing to give up time to help them. Some students felt that the shared commitment to and enjoyment of their subject helped to inform these more positive relationships. Students enjoyed being treated in a more adult way and having greater responsibility for their learning. They felt like they had the opportunity to try new things and take more academic risks because they were ultimately well supported by their teachers. They also feel that their teachers knew them well and they clearly felt a much greater sense of relatedness than they did in earlier years. It may be worth considering the role smaller class sizes had on these relationships and how opportunities for community projects and student-led initiatives helped students develop a greater sense of belonging and relatedness with their teachers. For example, in the sixth form, students run and organise the house system, which creates a sense of social cohesion. They also have a shared space to work and socialise in which too helps them to feel like they belong to a

specific community. Despite finite and scarce resources, similar teaching and social opportunities might also be found in lower year groups too.

7.6 Recommendations

Based on the experiences of the students I have worked with as part of this study I have nine recommendations for the school where my study was based to consider when supporting student transition into the sixth form.

1. The current induction system, which includes the two days in the summer of year 11 after the GCSE examinations, works well and students feel socially well supported during their move into the sixth form. For some, these days marked their transition and they enjoyed being able to try out their classes and meet with their peers who would be staying on with them (see sections 4.1 and 4.3). Even at this early stage with the house system and fun activities planned, there was the beginning of a new, more fluid social grouping, which students valued.
2. Provide opportunities for sixth-form students to discuss their transition into the sixth form with younger students. Particularly, encourage them to talk about the development of their skills and its importance. They could also talk about their experience of their subjects to support improved subject choice. Teachers are often under pressure to recruit students onto courses and so may emphasise certain elements of courses more favourably than others. Being able to talk to students who have studied the subject is invaluable as they will usually offer a frank view of their experience, but also illuminate elements that teachers may not be aware of or think of as significant see (section 4.1).
3. Development of self-regulation needs to be spoken about, modelled and opportunities for this provided in earlier years as well as the sixth form. Self-regulation in the sixth form is not planned for or supported explicitly. Such is its effect that greater opportunities to develop strategies and understand what self-regulation is and how they can achieve this will help them to be able to employ appropriate strategies when adapting to the demands of the sixth form (see section 6.3). Many students I spoke to discussed how ill prepared they felt for the sixth form by their experience of year 11.

If strategies were being established in lower year groups, they would be able to deploy these and feel a sense of continuity with their academic development.

4. Clear guidance on how to make good subject choices is important (see section 4.1).
The sixth form offers significant challenge for students and without sufficient motivation the effort necessary to be able to keep up is difficult for students to sustain. Much more time and effort needs to be devoted to helping students to develop clear career and educational goals to help them make the most appropriate subject choices. Linked to this could be support in learning how to develop and set meaningful short-term goals in order to structure their progress. To support this, a probationary period at the beginning of sixth form and enhanced opportunities to practice and trial subjects in the latter stages of year 11 may be useful to help students make fully informed decisions as well as being able to rectify any that are made with regard to subject choice.
5. It should be recognised how important the enhanced sense of relatedness is to students in the sixth form (see section 6.4). Where possible, within the demands of financial and timetabling constraints, class sizes should be kept smaller so teachers know their students well and can develop supportive relationships. If this is not possible, greater opportunities for students to develop a sense of belonging through other avenues, such as student-led social activities could also be considered.
6. Level 2 retake classes should not simply be the same as those experienced at GCSE (see section 4.1). They must look and feel like A Levels and teachers must have the same expectations of students in these classes as they have their A Level students – particularly as many of these will be planning to stay in the sixth form to continue onto A Levels after completing their re-sits. It is important that students have the opportunity to demonstrate their developing maturity and simply being treated the same as they were in previous years is dispiriting and also places them at odds with the experience of their peers who are enjoying classes that are more independent and challenging. In addition, simply repeating content in the same way leads to boredom and a lack of motivation. As these students have already covered the content, there is enormous scope within the re-take lessons to develop activities that support their skills development and prepare them for Level 3 study should they decide to stay on.
7. Develop a self-regulation skills package that can be delivered through subject-based lessons. This should be written so that all subject teachers can integrate activities into lessons early in their courses to help students learn about and try self-regulatory

strategies. By keeping this information subject specific, learners should be able to not only develop their understanding of the skill but also how it can be applied to specific tasks or subjects. By having a consistent approach across all subjects and teachers, students should also be able to develop an understanding of how strategies can be applied across different subjects. It also means all students have the same opportunities to develop self-regulatory strategies to support them with the challenges of the transition into the sixth form. Students also value the opportunity in the sixth form to develop skills for life after school and so should be shown how they are relevant elsewhere too (see sections 6.2 and 6.3).

8. Keep the mock examinations in January. With the new linear A Levels, the January mocks may now be less useful given that some students will not be preparing for examinations in the summer of year 12. However, their importance in the development and transition of students into the sixth form is significant (see section 4.1 and 4.3). For many the mock examinations marked the completion of their transition into the sixth form. They also underlined for many the level of academic challenge and re-energised their efforts. By this stage, many students already have a good idea of the requirements for their future plans after the school and so the mocks provide a very clear opportunity for them to assess their progress and the effectiveness of their strategies to date.
9. Share with parents or carers and students the decision regarding their entry into the sixth form before the students attend their re-admission interviews in September. Students attend these interviews alone and it is at this point they are told of their final course allocations. For most, this will essentially be a confirmation of what they applied to do. For others, either due to their GCSE results, timetabling issues or class sizes, they may not be able to do the courses they elected. Currently, they have no warning of this and so do not have the opportunity to discuss different options with their parents or carers before they attend the interview. Sharing this information gives students the opportunity to reassess their goals and get social support from their family. This should prevent students going through the very unsettling situation (like Owen) where they were expecting to be able to attend the courses they chose and suddenly being told they could not and having different ones imposed upon them.

7.7 My role and reflexivity

Throughout this study, I have tried to be clear about my role at each stage of the project. Initially, my professional understanding of the transition into the sixth form was used to frame the subject for my research. As an experienced practitioner, sixth-form tutor and sixth-form subject teacher I was aware that the transition into the sixth form was a significant point in the academic lives of students. One that some dealt with extremely well and others found much more challenging. Based on my previous MEd work and my research of the current literature on transition and transfer, I was able to identify that there was little in the way of work done with students of sixth-form age. I wanted to use a methodology that allowed me to give primacy to the views of the students going through this transition and what their experience of this event was like and IPA was an excellent fit for this.

Using IPA forced me to be reflexive at every stage of the research process. The literature I have used had to be framed, not as a source from which to derive a theory to be tested but as a source of contextual information for the study and to support the interpretative stages of the work. During the data collection period, where I interviewed the students and collected the snapshot data, I had to be aware of my role as an insider researcher and how the student responses might be shaped by that. In particular, in the interviews I had to be aware of my role in controlling the conversation and ensuring that students felt comfortable enough to not simply ‘tell me what I wanted to hear’. When developing my analyses of the interviews and snapshots I took care to take steps to ensure that my preconceptions or research goals did not colour my initial close reading and coding of the data. Even during the interpretative stage of the analysis I have tried at all times to stay as close to the student narratives as possible by ensuring that the interviews and snapshots evidence the interpretations I have presented. Finally, the conclusions and recommendations I have made are based on the descriptions of transition as described by the students and as such I hope will be useful in supporting other students not only through this transition but in other periods of their academic careers too.

Through the process of completing my EdD I have learnt a significant amount. Not only have I developed my understanding of a methodology that was new to me, but also I now feel that my knowledge of what students may experience as they move into the sixth form is significantly improved. Through the narratives of the students, I have gained new detailed insights into transition. By analysing these in light of the relevant academic literature I have

been able to expand and develop my professional knowledge and understanding of this transition event.

7.8 Limitations

As this study used an IPA approach, no attempt to generalise has been made and this study has been treated as a specific case. This means that although the findings and recommendations made may resonate in other settings, care needs to be taken not to assume this would be the case in all school-based sixth forms. Situational context including the social and academic networks supporting students have all been shown to be significant factors in how students cope with the transition. Differences in these would therefore cause students' lived-experiences in other institutions to vary significantly from those reported here.

This analysis of transition has been carried out where the students are transferring from year 11 straight into the sixth form without moving schools. This means they know the site, the teachers and their peers well. A significant deviation from the literature on transition identified in this work was the lack of social anxiety associated with this move. Therefore, the issues students did have were focused on things like workload and developing new working strategies. Whether this would be the same in a situation, where students had moved settings has not been investigated. It is likely that moving to a sixth-form college, where students are unfamiliar with many of their peers and do not know the teachers or site, would have a significant impact on their lived-experience of moving into the sixth form.

As an insider researcher there are always issues working with students. The power relationships as discussed in section 3.6.1 may have influenced what students shared with me about their transition into the sixth form. As both a sixth-form tutor and subject teacher, students may have been wary of being completely frank about their experiences. They may have felt vulnerable sharing negative points, particularly about specific subject experiences as I was in a position, in theory, to disclose this information to colleagues. I did as much as I could to reassure students that everything they shared would remain confidential (unless it raised a child protection issue). I also hoped that by having two interviews, being a familiar member of staff and being clear about the potential outcomes of the study that students would

feel positive about the study and share as accurately as they could their experiences. Equally, such positivity could have encouraged students not to explore elements of their transition that may not reflect positively on the school or members of staff. At all stages in the interviews to limit these issues as much as I could, I always reminded students of the reasons for the study and reassured them that all views shared – both positive and negative – would be treated confidentially.

During the writing of this study, there have been significant changes to government education policy and the associated inspection agendas. Across all key stages, there has been a drive towards a performative focus, including now (more than before) school sixth forms. The findings of this study reflect a sixth form setting where the performative nature of GCSEs and the associated instructional style of teachers seems to have stifled the academic freedoms of students. If there were to be a shift towards greater focus on the outcomes for students in the sixth form, would this stifle the opportunities for autonomy and self-directed learning that were at the heart of student experience? If this were to be the case, then the findings from this study and the associated recommendations made may be less applicable.

Since this data collection for this research was carried out, government agendas have meant that new linear A Levels have been introduced. With this, there is no longer a public examination for students at the end of year 12 if they are completing a full A Level course. This may alter the pressure felt by students in the first year of their transition. Those students I worked with were very aware that very soon after joining the sixth form they would have to prepare for mock examinations and then significant public examinations that would have implications for their application to university. With these pressures now gone, it may be that students' lived-experience of transition is different to that reported here and some of the issues that they faced may now no longer be relevant.

7.9 Further study

Given the lack of literature on transition and transfer into the sixth form, there is lots of scope for further study in this area. The first would be considering schools and sixth form colleges with different transition and transfer settings. Consideration of how students cope with the academic challenges of moving into the sixth form alongside the social challenges of moving

institution would be very interesting. This is where most of the literature on earlier transfer points focus and although this did not resonate with my own study, it would be interesting to see whether there are any parallels or differences with students of sixth-form age.

Self-regulated learning was a central part of many of the students' experiences of moving into the sixth form. However, none of them engaged with this in a formalised way, as they were not taught about self-regulative strategies but developed them in an informal, organic way to differing levels of success. Investigating the impact of introducing these to students before they move into the sixth form and if this has any effect on their experience of transition would be useful to help support students academically.

Given the changes to the A Level courses and their linear delivery, it would be interesting to see if this has any impact on students' experiences. It may be that they feel they have more time and freedom to explore learning strategies. Conversely, they may find themselves in a situation similar to GCSE where end goals, which are two years away, are hard to focus on and may have negative implications on their levels of motivation and desire to test new strategies and work at the limits of their academic abilities.

Finally, it would be interesting to work with teachers to understand why they work so differently with students in the sixth form and why their expectations of students change so much. By unpacking this with them, the insight for practice might help to inform work with younger students as well as strategies to support the development of academic skills so that when students arrive in the sixth form they have already begun to develop the sort of learning strategies teachers in the sixth form expect them to have.

This study has been exactly what it set out to be – exploratory. It has opened up new insight into the experience of transition into the sixth form. Most excitingly though it has offered glimpses into the ways in which we could better support our students. These are the avenues which now need to be explored in more detail to ensure that where possible, all students' experience of transition is as positive as it can be.

8. References

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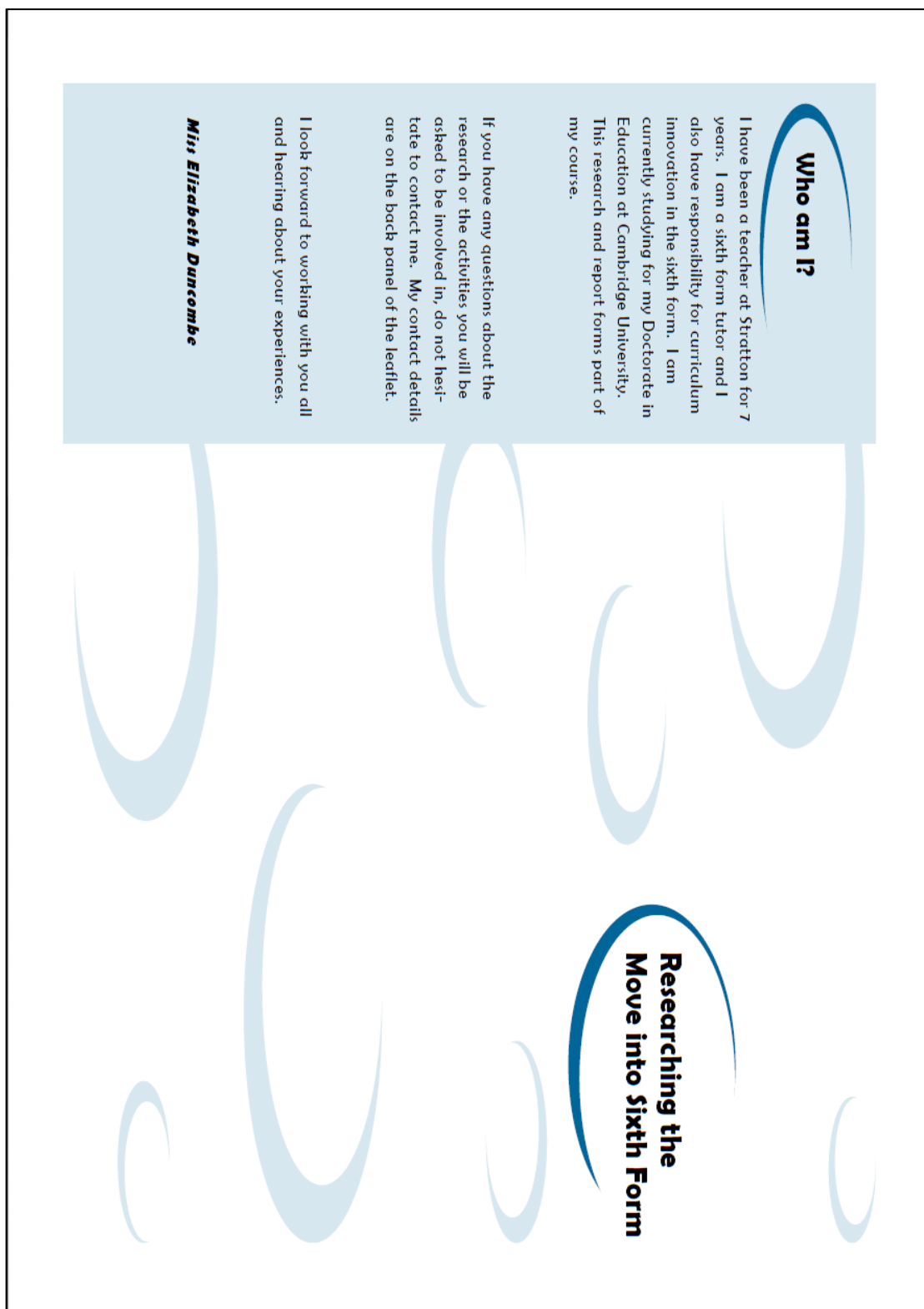
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9. Appendices

9.1 Information leaflet provided to students who volunteered to be involved in the interviews



What is the aim of the project?

Thank you for showing an interest in being involved in the interview element of this project. I hope this information will be useful.

The aim of the project is to increase our understanding of how students cope with the transition between year 11 and sixth form.

Why do the project?

In the very near future, all students will be staying in some form of education until the age of 18. There is currently very little research on the effects of the move up into sixth form. This project aims to help fill some of these gaps left by the research.

What are the key questions of the project?

The project aims to address this key question:

What is the experience of students as they make the transition into the sixth form?

What will the project entail?

The project will take place between September 2013 and April 2014 and includes two interviews:

- The first interview will be in November. The second will be in April.

What will the interviews be like?

The interviews are completely voluntary. Students will be interviewed by me individually for about half an hour to discuss what their experience of moving into the sixth form has been like. They will be asked questions like:

- Can you describe what the move from year 11 to year 12 has been like for you?
- Can you tell me how the sixth form is different from your experience of year 11?

The interviews will be used to listen to students about how they have approached the move into sixth form.

What will happen to interview information?

All interviews will be recorded. To keep the information provided anonymous, students will be asked to provide a name that can be used instead of their own in the final report. The audio files will be safely stored during the project.

How will the interview information be used?

The interview information will be used to help us more fully understand what the experience of moving into the sixth form is like. Form this we hope to be able to improve the support and guidance we offer students through this period.

Who will read the information?

The project will be available for you to see if you wish. It will also be read by people interested in the effects of moving from year 11 into the sixth form, e.g. other teachers or educational researchers.

9.2 Power Point presentation slides used to share project information with students

Would you like to help?

- I am doing a two year research project into what it is like for students to transition into the sixth form.
- I am hoping that what I find out might help us to improve the support and guidance we provide students as they make the move into the sixth form.

What is involved?

- You can get involved in two ways:
 - In form time by recording some short notes about your experiences based on question prompts.
 - By taking part in two interviews spread across the academic year to talk in more detail what it has been like for you to move into the sixth form.
- Any involvement is completely voluntary.

What is involved in the interviews?

- There are two interview slots, one in November and one in April.
- The interviews will be in a free period and last around half an hour.

What questions might I be asked?

- Can you describe what the transition into the sixth form has been like for you?
- Can you tell me about how the sixth form is different to your experience of year 11?
- Can you give me examples of how things are different now compared to year 11?

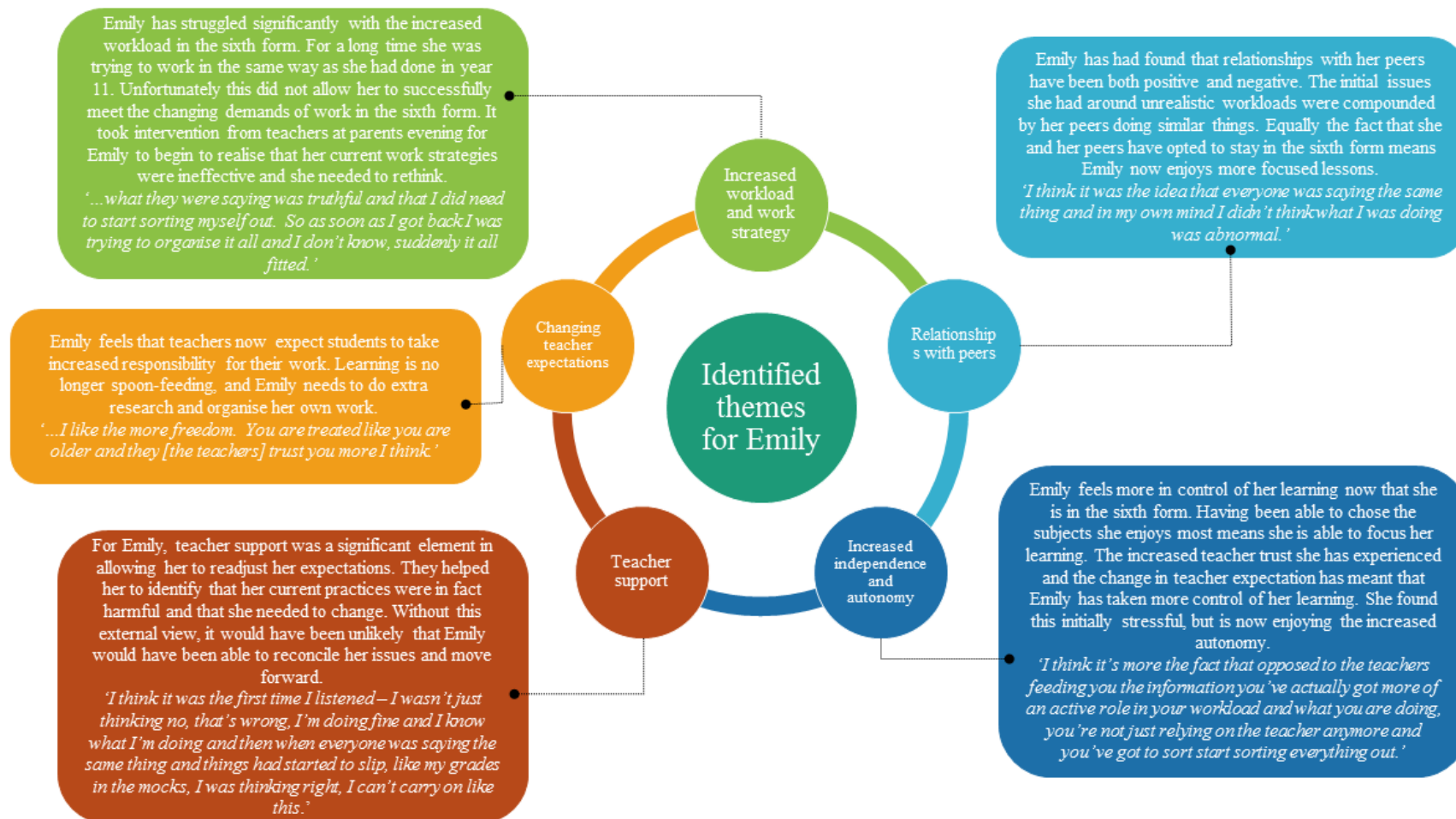
How will the information be used?

- I will be writing up the information you share with me in my thesis.
- This will be read by other people interested in this type of student experience and shared with school so we can offer better support where needed for sixth form students.
- Any information you share will be anonymised.

More information

- If you would like to take part in the interviews, you will be given a leaflet taking you in more detail through how you will be involved in the project.
- Any questions?

9.3 Example of early summary diagram used to share emerging themes with colleagues



9.4 Complete snapshot data

9.4.1 Snap shot data from October 2013

Respondent Number	Level 2 Responses
1	<p>It's been a big jump into a better environment</p> <p>You have free periods to do independent work and more freedom</p> <p>Free periods, home study and more</p>
14	<p>The transition into sixth form has been fine and it was quite simple the only problem I had was not receiving letters letting me know what was going on.</p> <p>It is very different compared to year 11 as we have a lot more freedom and it's more laid back.</p> <p>Differences – free periods, wear own clothes, teachers talk to you better.</p>
23	<p>The biggest change in sixth form is the amount of homework/coursework I get I don't get much homework and the coursework is easy. I've enjoyed some new subjects like young enterprise and business.</p>
24	<p>It was difficult to get used to.</p> <p>I haven't got bullied as much as I did in year 11.</p> <p>The work is more challenging and I feel like I fit in.</p> <p>The bullying has finally stopped.</p> <p>Making new friends.</p> <p>Getting more involved with the school and the sixth form.</p>

Respondent Number	Level 3 Responses
2	<p>The transition into sixth form has been hard for me because the workload is completely different to GCSE.</p> <p>The sixth form is better than GCSE because students are allowed to be more independent.</p> <p>We now have free lessons to catch up on work.</p> <p>The biggest change has been the work load.</p>
3	<p>I like the independence</p> <p>A lot more work</p> <p>Teachers respect you more</p>
4	<p>The transition into the sixth form has been challenging because it is so different compared to year 11. I feel that during the first two weeks of sixth form, the lessons were quite full on and there wasn't time to settle into the sixth form. The positives of being in sixth form is that you can now focus on your desired subjects and there aren't any distractions.</p>
5	<p>The most challenging thing between the transition from year 11 to sixth form is that it gave me more responsibility and I relied mainly on myself.</p>
6	<p>Been lots of help and support during and after the move.</p> <p>I like the more independent work.</p> <p>Lots of work to take in, very busy lessons.</p> <p>Homework nearly every lesson.</p>
7	<p>Massive jump – very hard, such much more work.</p> <p>Teachers have a lot more trust with you. A lot more work to do.</p> <p>The biggest change is the amount of work to do and the respect with teachers.</p> <p>Having rest but balancing work as well.</p>
8	<p>How things are different:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clothes • A lot more work • Closer to teachers – they get to know you better • More independent <p>Difference is workload is too big</p>

9	<p>We are treated more as equals by teachers and staff which gives a different feel to learning.</p> <p>So much more work has to be done outside of lessons it can feel quite suffocating if you aren't on top of it.</p>
10	<p>Allowed to wear more comfortable clothing</p> <p>Get treated better, more like adults.</p> <p>The subjects are ONLY what I want to be doing.</p>
11	<p>There has been many changes in the transition to sixth form but the biggest change has been how we are treated.</p>
12	<p>The transition into sixth form has been fairly easy, no problems so far although the work is a lot harder than in GCSE.</p> <p>Work a lot harder; needing to use up all of my free time. A lot more freedom in the sixth form compared to year 11.</p> <p>Free periods, wear what you want within reason.</p> <p>Biggest change: the extra amount of effort needed for A Level work compared to GCSE work.</p>
13	<p>The transition into sixth form wasn't as bad as I expected. The difficult part is trying to do A Level work and get a high grade, as the high GCSE grades are low A Level. The work is more challenging and a lot of outside work is required which was hard to adjust to at first. I do about 5 hours of English outside of school. The biggest change has been study periods and having study time if a teacher isn't in instead of a sub teacher. I really enjoy the different lessons which I couldn't get in GCSE.</p>
15	<p>Difference to Year 11: more independent; do the subject you want.</p> <p>Biggest change: More independence</p> <p>Challenges: Organising workload</p> <p>Enjoyable aspects: Different activities/opportunities</p>

<p>16</p>	<p>The workload increases a lot, with many more homeworks to hand in <u>on time</u> and coursework to always complete.</p> <p>If you get behind in your work you will struggle to get back on task: keep to deadlines</p> <p>Smaller year group, get to know a lot more about people you haven't really spoken to before.</p> <p>Time will be easier if work is completed in free periods</p> <p>'[School] community' – house challenges are enjoyable.</p>
<p>17</p>	<p>I feel that the transition into the sixth form has been easy.</p> <p>It is different because you are doing the lesson you want to do and you have free periods to do extra work in.</p> <p>I don't have to worry about setting aside some time to do homework after school as I do it in my frees.</p> <p>The work has been more intense.</p> <p>The amount of work we have to do.</p> <p>Been given so much more responsibility and freedom.</p>
<p>18</p>	<p>The main change/problem going into year 12 is the workload, previously very little homework was given and now we get over an hour a night.</p> <p>More responsibilities required.</p> <p>Need to stay on top of work.</p> <p>Need to use free periods productively and efficiently.</p> <p>Check understanding every lesson, makes it very hard to move on in the subject if you don't understand 100%.</p>
<p>19</p>	<p>Not like I thought – more work than I thought there would be.</p> <p>Things are different as there is more trust and teachers don't chase you for work as much.</p> <p>What's challenged me the most is keeping up to date with all work as I'll put in a plan then get more work so seems like don't have enough time to complete.</p>

20	<p>The transition into sixth form has been quite difficult and confusing, but certain aspects have been easy as it's the same school.</p> <p>It's a much larger and independent workload from year 11, missing any lessons is vital.</p> <p>Lessons are always 100% packed.</p> <p>It has been a challenge to know what to expect in my exams as I feel like they haven't been explained.</p> <p>Most enjoyable aspect is not having a large variety of lessons.</p>
21	<p>Transition into the sixth form has been different to how I thought, I thought the main change would be the difficulty of lessons but it is really the workload.</p> <p>Year 12 is different to sixth form because I like being trusted not to have a cover teacher if our teacher is absent. Also I like the free periods to be able to do my own independent learning in whatever subject I feel I need it.</p> <p>The workload and the constant assessment progress tests especially in chemistry and biology to constantly revise for have been the most challenging aspects of sixth form. Also having very little free time because of balancing sixth form and a part time job in evenings and the weekend.</p>
22	<p>I would say the only really big change for me has been an increased amount of independence and responsibility for my own learning.</p>
25	<p>Thrown straight into the deep end.</p> <p>More independent becomes pressurising.</p> <p>Work becomes harder.</p> <p>More expectations from <u>all</u> teachers.</p> <p>Hardest change is trying to find motivation, for independent study.</p> <p>Enjoy the freedom.</p>
26	<p>Workload is much harder and teachers expect you just to pick it up.</p> <p>Sometimes treated like an adult, then sometimes like a child which can put you off.</p> <p>Haven't really enjoyed sixth form might move to college – treat you more grown up and independent.</p> <p>Have enjoyed study periods to try and catch up.</p> <p>Hard to find lots of motivation and perseverance.</p>

27	Challenging, hold a lot more responsibility for independent work in year 11. But it's been quite easy to get used to the extra work load and is enjoyable as I'm doing the subjects that I enjoy.
28	The main difference between year 11 and sixth form is that you have more responsibilities to do work outside of lessons and meet deadlines of work as it is more individual learning and doing more work yourself than in a class and you need to be on top of work because you will be needed to complete more homeworks and individual learning yourself.
29	My transition into sixth form has been challenging as the workload has been very hard to keep on top of as I have so many commitments outside of school. I did not feel prepared for this huge increase. I have enjoyed having more independence and a better relationship with teachers.
30	The change from year 11 to 12 is that it is more personal learning and the lessons that you do are more interesting. Although it is a lot of work.
31	The transition up to sixth form has been very rewarding, although hard at times. The jump academically is huge yet all the subject teachers I have, have been very supportive and understanding. The time management and prioritising of homework is also considerably more difficult, but there has been plenty of advice and support. Sixth form requires more personal maturity and studying, and it could be more reassuring to meet briefly with a member of the sixth form staff for specialist advice for everyone: it needn't be long but would be reassuring as a new member of the sixth form. All teachers are very helpful and the form tutors are wonderful, but it may be nice to have a greater one-to-one contact with members of the sixth form team. It's great!
32	The transition has been difficult for me. I have been slapped in the face by the work load and it is taking me a while to acclimatise. Things are different now as there is more pressure to work at a high standard. The most enjoyable aspect of moving into the sixth form has been the familiarity of the school.

33	<p>The transition into sixth form was quite difficult to start with as it was a big change from year 11. The subjects were new, the teachers were new and so were the people in the classes. However, the teachers were very supportive and helped me with it. Sixth form is different from year 11 because you get a lot more freedom and are treated more like adults, although there is a lot more work and self-teaching involved in the subjects.</p>
34	<p>Good, but sixth form was not as welcoming as I thought it would have been.</p> <p>Subjects which are exam based haven't been too bad but the courses which are coursework based have been a lot harder than year 11.</p> <p>Get a little more responsibility but feel a little more grown up.</p> <p>My work ethic has changed and the work level has increased.</p> <p>The work level in terms of the grade boundaries has challenged me the most.</p>
35	<p>It's been good because sixth formers are treated like adults.</p> <p>It's much better, I can focus more because I chose to be in that certain subject.</p> <p>More freedom.</p> <p>How teachers treat you as a student.</p> <p>The freedom and not having to worry about 7 different subjects. Now I only have to focus on 4.</p>
36	<p>They don't have to do a million assemblies about how big the jump is because it doesn't prepare anyone, it only makes us feel scared. No teachers seem to care and find out how students are dealing with things, there should be more set meetings to track how students are dealing under the stress because I know there is so much pressure and can sometimes be too much and you feel like you have no one to help you. Also subject teachers need to take into account the amount of homework you're getting from other teachers, there's not enough communication.</p>

37	<p>My transition into the sixth form has been positive. In the sixth form there is a lot more freedom with finishing work by using free periods. The biggest change has been getting used to a one week timetable, having frees and a lesson after school. I have enjoyed not having to do the set subjects such as science and English, being able to do only the lessons that I want to do.</p>
38	<p>The things that have challenged me the most in sixth form is what the teachers expect from pupils.</p> <p>The most enjoyable aspects of sixth form is things like young enterprise and Duke of Edinburgh.</p> <p>The difference between year 11 and sixth form is the amount of work/homework we have and how challenging the work is.</p>
39	<p>Underestimated the work load.</p> <p>We are expected to know everything from GCSE – should have revised that in the summer.</p> <p>In sixth form you get treated like an adult.</p> <p>It's tempting not to work in study periods, but when the work load increases you have to.</p>
40	<p>Only do the lessons you choose – more time to focus on what you like – treated more adult from GCSE.</p> <p>More work than GCSE – had to really focus on meeting deadlines and keeping up with work.</p> <p>In GCSE teachers nag you to meet deadlines – A Level it's up to you.</p>
41	<p>Sixth form has been a big jump from year 11 as there is a lot more independence and informality. I find it nice how the teachers trust us to get on with our own work more, but sometimes I would like more guidance and extra revision sessions as we only have a matter of months to learn everything.</p>
42	<p>I think that the only challenge has been to fit time in after school to finish coursework because the deadlines have been quite strict, and because the work is harder it can be tough to get everything done on time.</p> <p>It is good to have independent study as it means I can get some work done which fits around my needs.</p>

43	In sixth form there is a responsibility to work independently in lessons, and to do more work out of lessons. Also there is less tolerance of late or unfinished homework. You are expected to be more organised and have responsibility to bring all work necessary to lessons.
44	The biggest change that happens when moving into sixth form is the amount of control you're suddenly given over your education/learning, and how unprepared you realise you are. Another big change is seeing the way in which other people perceive you, e.g. the way teachers act.
45	Sixth form feels like a separate school. We are treated differently and are given more freedom. I like the fact we have time to study within the school day because it is easier to balance study and home life. The new subjects I took are challenging and the different structures of writing are hard to get used to. Sixth form is good and I feel it changes people's attitude to school for the better.

9.4.2 Snap shot data from March 2014

Respondent Number	Level 2 Responses
1	I didn't feel a significant change when I joined 6 th form I feel that happened as I was in classes with similar people to who I was with when I was in year 11.
34	Not challenging due to level 2 and resultants due to significant drop in work flow since GCSE un-motivating. It has also made me feel like level 3 will be a lot more difficult since level 2 is easier than GCSE.
36	When I came up to sixth form, I felt nothing new since the only new thing that was introduced to me was the free periods which I quickly picked up and was quickly part of my system.

Respondent Number	Level 3 Responses
2	<p>It was an easy transition.</p> <p>I do not feel like anything affects me</p> <p>After I had gone to all my lessons for the first time and got comfortable.</p>
3	<p>At first I struggled with the big increase in private study, as I am not very good at independent learning.</p> <p>The teachers treating you like an adult made me feel part of the sixth form.</p>
4	<p>Moving into the sixth form was easy as the support and help from teachers was very useful.</p> <p>The teachers are more relaxed and trustworthy which creates a relaxed working environment for me.</p>
5	<p>Very hard and took time to get used to it.</p> <p>I felt that the transition was over when we got study leave.</p>
6	<p>Easy – there was lots of support</p> <p>Time management</p> <p>A couple of weeks before the mocks because it felt more serious.</p>
7	<p>At first I was worried about the work load but I have now settled in.</p> <p>I think the transition to sixth form was over as we were revising for mocks in Feb. as we had a taste of what sixth form exams and revision was like.</p>
8	<p>It was quite a smooth transition if I am honest. Although the teachers kept drilling into us that it will be more work, and if this was not for you then do not take it.</p> <p>The environment was friendly, the year 13's didn't look down on us, and I personally felt comfortable and determined straight away.</p>
9	<p>Confusing, not given much advice on how to get head start on independent study, e.g. how to make notes, etc.</p> <p>No</p> <p>Transition was over just before Christmas I think as I knew what I needed to do and how to better my learning to be the best it can be.</p>

<p>10</p>	<p>It was easy and hassle free.</p> <p>There are no effects of moving into the sixth form</p> <p>When we did the two induction days</p> <p>Because I knew what to expect when I was going to come into sixth form.</p>
<p>11</p>	<p>I felt that my transition to sixth form was easy as I felt that it went well because I can handle with change well.</p> <p>Looking back I feel that when I first moved into sixth form I was a bit scared. However, now I believe I have no worries for sixth form.</p> <p>I think my transition from year 11 to sixth form was clear and easy because I'm good with change and cope with stress.</p>
<p>12</p>	<p>Scary, couldn't cope with the workload and homework deadlines.</p> <p>No, I feel like I am completely settled and so enjoy sixth form life</p> <p>Christmas time – I realised the amount of work I was doing was unsustainable and so organised my time much more effectively and accepted that it was impossible to get all of my work done by the end of each day.</p>
<p>13</p>	<p>I feel that my transition into the sixth form was over after the second week of term. The reason I felt it was over, was that I got working into the subjects I had chosen to take and had been in a relaxed environment to help me get used to life in the sixth form really quickly and this made me feel my transition was over.</p> <p>There are no effects of moving into the sixth form that are effecting me.</p>
<p>14</p>	<p>I do not think that there are any outstanding effects of me moving into the sixth form. I feel fully part of the sixth form and I would say I felt this after the first term when I started to focus on my subject areas.</p>
<p>15</p>	<p>I don't think we were fully prepared for how much harder the work was and how much of a step up work is.</p>
<p>16</p>	<p>The move into sixth form was challenging at first because of the amount of work increase greatly making it a bit difficult to start off with.</p> <p>I still find the amount of work a bit challenging but I'm managing it a lot better now.</p> <p>I felt that the transition into sixth form was over when we got back from Christmas because we had been in the sixth form long enough.</p>

17	<p>It was quite scary at first, especially the larger workload and having seen older siblings and friends go through sixth form and have problems. It felt daunting.</p> <p>Moving into the sixth form has made me responsible and closer to people I wouldn't usually have been around. Difference in ability was something that set people apart during GCSEs whereas now, with a large amount of people making the same mistakes, it is less of a factor.</p>
18	<p>Moving into sixth form was fun as work became slowly harder so as long as I didn't let it pile up it was manageable and now I can do a lot more than I used to be able to do a year ago.</p> <p>As more information was given to me at the higher levels, other things from GCSE made sense as at the level they describe it to you at GCSE you just need to accept at A Level you can understand it.</p>
19	<p>Not too hard more independent than first thought.</p> <p>Balancing all four subjects – trying to spend an equal time on and staying motivated. This is still there because there is no solution.</p> <p>After October half term because by then you know all the advantages and disadvantages.</p>
20	<p>The move into sixth form was scary but it did not prepare me for the amount of work there would be. All the assemblies that try and show you there is a lot of work do not seem to be effective when it actually comes to the work that needs to be done. The jump through, minus the work load, wasn't bad, the freedom that was given was very nice and was motivating but I felt like after a while they began to show that you didn't have as much freedom as you thought. It is hard catching up if you leave it a while and teachers do not want to help as much with you catching up. Although most students do not feel like they're able to talk to the teachers or get any help. Showing they can would be useful. The transition felt it was over when the workload got so much that you couldn't concentrate on anything but that.</p>
21	<p>Moving into sixth form wasn't very difficult as I wasn't bothered by the pressure of the year.</p> <p>Not really except more HMWK</p> <p>In the first week.</p>

22	<p>Moving into the sixth form wasn't that much of a big deal in terms of subjects as I was choosing ones mainly that I had already done.</p> <p>However, it's a lot different in terms of independence and time management.</p> <p>I felt part of the sixth form once we started our mocks as we were settled into our subjects.</p>
23	<p>Moving into sixth form was now how I expected it to be, the way sixth form working was different to GCSE. If you couldn't keep everything in check, e.g. time management, homework etc. then it became hard to cope.</p> <p>As we got further into the year it became easier to manage, and you knew how to cope.</p>
24	<p>I didn't feel prepared for the amount of independence we'd receive. This meant that for me, the out of school work was hard to get used to, I found it particularly hard to motivate myself to work hard everyday.</p> <p>I can still feel the effects of this. Sometimes. I don't know when if felt I am now a part of the sixth form, I think it has been more gradual.</p>
25	<p>Moving into sixth form was a shock in some subjects, as the work load dramatically increased.</p> <p>Closer to the exams, there isn't enough time to do everything, but sixth form is better now that we have developed study skills that we didn't need in GCSE.</p>
26	<p>Overwhelming, exciting, big jump.</p> <p>Started the year not reading/revising now my work could be better if I had the knowledge.</p> <p>After Xmas, we were settled and I wasn't comparing A Levels to GCSE anymore.</p>
27	<p>I thought it was stressful the few weeks that we moved in and still believed that sixth form was stressful up to Christmas time. I didn't enjoy it and thought that college/apprenticeships would be a better option for me. After receiving positive mock results it has made it easier for me to work hard and feel more positive about being in the sixth form. The transition wasn't as good as I hoped but I am settled now and enjoy sixth form very much.</p>

28	<p>To begin with it felt like I wasn't going to be in sixth form for a while, it just felt like for a couple of weeks.</p> <p>I am still finding some of the work load hard but I am getting used to it still.</p>
29	<p>As soon as we had good relationships with our teachers and embraced the courses, we were able to feel at home and comfortable.</p> <p>There is still the mentality from GCSE, that only a C or above is a pass, not an E at A Level.</p>
30	<p>I found moving into sixth form difficult because I got really anxious about the new lessons, teachers and classes. I still get anxious about sixth form but nowhere near as much as I feel I have gotten used to the changes from GCSE to A Level. The support from teachers has also made it easier for me to settle into sixth form.</p>
31	<p>It was challenging and different.</p> <p>Some affect is possibly being a bit behind in coursework as I didn't prepare myself for all massive work load.</p> <p>Still not.</p>
32	<p>I felt like I became part of the sixth form when I got my mock grades back as I could see the progress I'm making.</p> <p>Moving into sixth form was unnerving as there was so much independence.</p>
33	<p>Not much difference just a little bit harder.</p> <p>No.</p> <p>After the first month when all of the work started to build up.</p>
35	<p>It was quite easy to get used to sixth form. I felt I was part of it as soon as I came in as teachers treated me as a young adult who can take care of their learning. It made sixth form feel easy to cope with as I was willing to do extra work if you aren't it isn't a small transition.</p>
37	<p>It was a bit intimidating moving into sixth form because it was like moving from being the oldest to the youngest again.</p> <p>No.</p> <p>After the first couple of weeks.</p> <p>When you get used to the work load.</p>

9.5 The identified superordinate themes and their related subthemes

Superordinate theme	Students contributing to this theme	Subthemes	Students contributing to this subtheme	Key quotes
Teachers expect students to take control of their own learning.	Anna Ben Charlie Emily James Nancy	Teachers take on a facilitator role.	Ben Charlie James	<i>They give you tasks to do and then you have to do them yourself. (James)</i> <i>I feel teachers just sort of treated you more like an adult and trusted you to get on with the work. (Nancy)</i>
		Being treated in a more adult way.	Anna Ben Charlie Emily James	<i>I think teachers expect a lot more of you, they expect you to be a lot more grown up straight away. (Anna)</i> <i>I think being treated more as an adult I prefer it [...] we sort of get a choice of what we're doing. (Ben)</i>
		Developing skills for life after school.	Ben Emily James Nancy	<i>You don't rely on the teachers as much, it's your own doing, which I think is better because it gets us set into the wider world. (Ben)</i> <i>I think you need that independence, especially if you want to go to uni and stuff if you have no independence in sixth form then it's going to be a complete change in lifestyle and shock. (Nancy)</i>
		Students have greater responsibility.	Anna Ben Charlie Emily Nancy	<i>It was my choice to do what I wanted to do, it was my choice why I wanted to come here. (Ben)</i> <i>You're in kind of charge if your work, so you don't get told to do this, it's you're kind of in control. (Charlie)</i> <i>You're not relying on the teacher anymore and you've got to start sorting everything out. (Emily)</i>

Superordinate theme	Students contributing to this theme	Subthemes	Students contributing to this subtheme	Key quotes
Opportunities to self-regulate	<p>Anna Ben Emily James Nancy</p> <p>Harry and Liz also discussed elements of this, but this did not form one of their main themes of their narratives. They are included here for completeness.</p>	Students have greater responsibility	<p>Anna Ben Charlie Emily James Liz Nancy</p>	<p><i>It was my choice to do what I wanted to do, it was my choice why I wanted to come here (Ben)</i></p> <p><i>You're in kind of charge if your work, so you don't get told to do this, it's you're kind of in control (Charlie)</i></p> <p><i>You're not relying on the teacher anymore and you've got to start sorting everything out (Emily)</i></p>
		Students plan their time and activities to match the learning requirements	<p>Anna Ben Emily Harry James Liz Nancy</p>	<p><i>... using my time productively like in lessons and my frees. I had to learn that along the way, to learn that stuff (Anna)</i></p> <p><i>I work best when I am sitting on my own, either quietly or with my music in (Harry)</i></p>
		Students are highly motivated	<p>Anna Ben Emily Harry James Nancy</p>	<p><i>Knowing that playing football isn't the best choice if I can be revising (Ben)</i></p> <p><i>... you're not relying on other people and you're kind of doing it yourself and learning things without too much help (Emily)</i></p>
		Students have specific goals that they monitor their progress towards	<p>Anna Ben Emily Harry</p>	<p><i>...now I know what I want to do career wise I want to stick to it and I want to do it (Ben)</i></p> <p><i>it really is helpful to talk to teachers about how you are doing or what you can do to improve because it gives you something to aim for (Claire)</i></p>

Superordinate theme	Students contributing to this theme	Subthemes	Students contributing to this subtheme	Key quotes
Increased teacher support	<p>Claire James Liz Nancy</p> <p>Harry spoke about this, but it was not one of the main themes from his narratives. He is included here for completeness</p>	Teachers are more approachable	Claire Harry James	<p><i>...you can like talk to them [teachers] more as a, not as a friend, but more as a like associate more than a teacher (James)</i></p> <p><i>It feels more comfortable like talking to teachers and asking for help. You have like a closer relationship with them (Claire)</i></p>
		Teachers have more time to support students	Claire Harry Liz Nancy	<i>I think because there is less people in a class you naturally get more support (Liz)</i>
		Teachers recognise the commitment students are making	Harry Liz	<p><i>they know you care about it as much if not more than they do (Harry)</i></p> <p><i>... although teachers don't have much time they do make as much time for you as possible because they know how hard A Levels are and how much content there is (Liz)</i></p>
		Students feel a greater sense of relatedness with their teachers	Harry James Liz	<i>Yeah the teachers suddenly become a lot more informal very quickly. And I think that helps learning because you can be more honest with them, and they will be more honest with you (Harry)</i>

Superordinate theme	Students contributing to this theme	Subthemes	Students contributing to this subtheme	Key quotes
Improved self-efficacy	Ben Emily Harry James	Students have been able to meet the challenges they have faced	Ben Emily Harry	<i>I sort of like this new change I get quite used to it and still at the minute I'm happier to be here and I like the transition because it has made me more mature (Ben)</i> <i>I did need to start sorting myself out and so as soon as I got back I was trying to organise it all and I don't know it suddenly all fitted (Emily)</i>
		Feedback from teachers allowed students to see progress	Emily James	<i>I think it was the first time I listened – I wasn't just thinking no, that's wrong, I'm doing fine and I know what I'm doing (Emily)</i> <i>I started to knuckle down more and feeling good about getting good results (James)</i>
		Students develop new ways of working	Ben Emily Harry	<i>So I think it's given me more of a prompt to go and do things myself, whereas before, whereas other students wouldn't do as well, they would rely on the teacher to tell them what to do and how to do it (Ben)</i>
		Students have clear, proximal goals	Ben James Harry	<i>...now I know what I want to do career wise I want to stick to it and I want to do it (Ben)</i>

Superordinate theme	Students contributing to this theme	Subthemes	Students contributing to this subtheme	Key quotes
Increased workload	Anna Charlie Claire Emily Liz Nancy	Students have greater responsibility	Anna Charlie Claire Emily Liz Nancy	<i>You're in kind of charge if your work, so you don't get told to do this, it's you're kind of in control (Charlie)</i> <i>You're not relying on the teacher anymore and you've got to start sorting everything out (Emily)</i>
		Old working strategies are no longer effective	Anna Emily Liz Nancy	<i>now I'm kind of like what works for me? And I know that I learn better from writing, like I'm not a reading learner. So I just started it and it worked (Liz)</i>
		Students are prepared to do more work than they did at GCSE Level	Anna Charlie Claire Emily Liz Nancy	<i>I realised I had to work a lot harder to get just even like a C (Liz)</i> <i>I just end up doing more work, like start earlier and just cut out things that you would normally do like watch TV, just do your HMWK and stuff (Nancy)</i>
		Students underestimate the amount of additional work required	Anna Charlie Claire Liz Nancy	<i>I didn't realise how much extra work you had to do, like looking back I would have been better prepared if I had gone over my notes when I got home everyday instead of now doing it now (Anna)</i> <i>I sort of found if you missed a lesson it almost felt like you missed a week just because each teacher covers so much of the course (Liz)</i>

Superordinate theme	Students contributing to this theme	Subthemes	Students contributing to this subtheme	Key quotes
New working strategies	Anna Claire Emily Liz Nancy	Students are forced to adopt new strategies due to the demands of workload	Anna Claire Emily Liz Nancy	<i>the workload is so much more intense than GCSE and I don't think I really anticipated how hard it would be (Claire)</i> <i>you find in sixth form you have to revise earlier to get the knowledge in so you'll be ready for the exams (Nancy)</i>
		Students develop strategies as a result of reflection on their progress	Anna Claire Emily Liz Nancy	<i>...you have to write a lot more detail and there is a lot more reading over you have to do, like you can't just go to a lesson and then go to one a week later and like you won't remember what you did last week (Liz)</i>
		Students try new strategies only if old ones used at GCSE don't work	Anna Claire Emily Liz	<i>...before I could do it all in one evening and now I had to space it out depending on when it was due in and I wasn't used to having work left over (Emily)</i> <i>I've worked out that mind maps really help me, like especially when I was revising for geography (Liz)</i>
		Students have greater responsibility	Anna Claire Emily Liz Nancy	<i>If you work hard you get the grades and people who don't, rather than teachers spending time with them trying to help them, if they don't work hard they don't get the grades and it's their own fault (Claire)</i> <i>You're not relying on the teacher anymore and you've got to start sorting everything out (Emily)</i>